DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 212 054 EA 014 327

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TITLE School Budgeting: Problems and Solutions. AASA Critical Issues Report.

INSTITUTION American Association of School Administrators, Arlington, Va.
PUB DATE 82
NOTE 73p.
AVAILABLE FROM American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, VA 22209 (Stock No. 021-00900; $10.95; quantity discounts; orders under $15.00 must be prepaid).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Budgeting; *Budgets; Case Studies; Citizen Participation; Collective Bargaining; Educational Finance; Elementary Secondary Education; *Financial Problems; Lobbying; News Media; Public Relations; Retrenchment; School Budget Elections

ABSTRACT

School budget problems are discussed in 13 chapters, and solutions are suggested. Case studies present successful experiences with various problems while brief subsections summarize recommended actions. The first two chapters note that budget problems are worsening and trace the causes to tax revolts, state involvement in education, and the decline of school incomes, enrollments, and public confidence. Topics covered in the remaining chapters include (1) seven steps that help solve budget problems; (2) alternative budgeting methods, such as zero-base, program, or school-based budgeting; (3) participation of other groups in budget development; (4) making budget contents understandable; (5) planning budget cuts; (6) strategies for school finance campaigns; (7) the four basic public relations steps of analysis, planning, communication, and evaluation; (8) tips for working with the news media; (9) responses to six common criticisms of public schools; (10) collective bargaining methods; and (11) lobbying in state legislatures. (RW)

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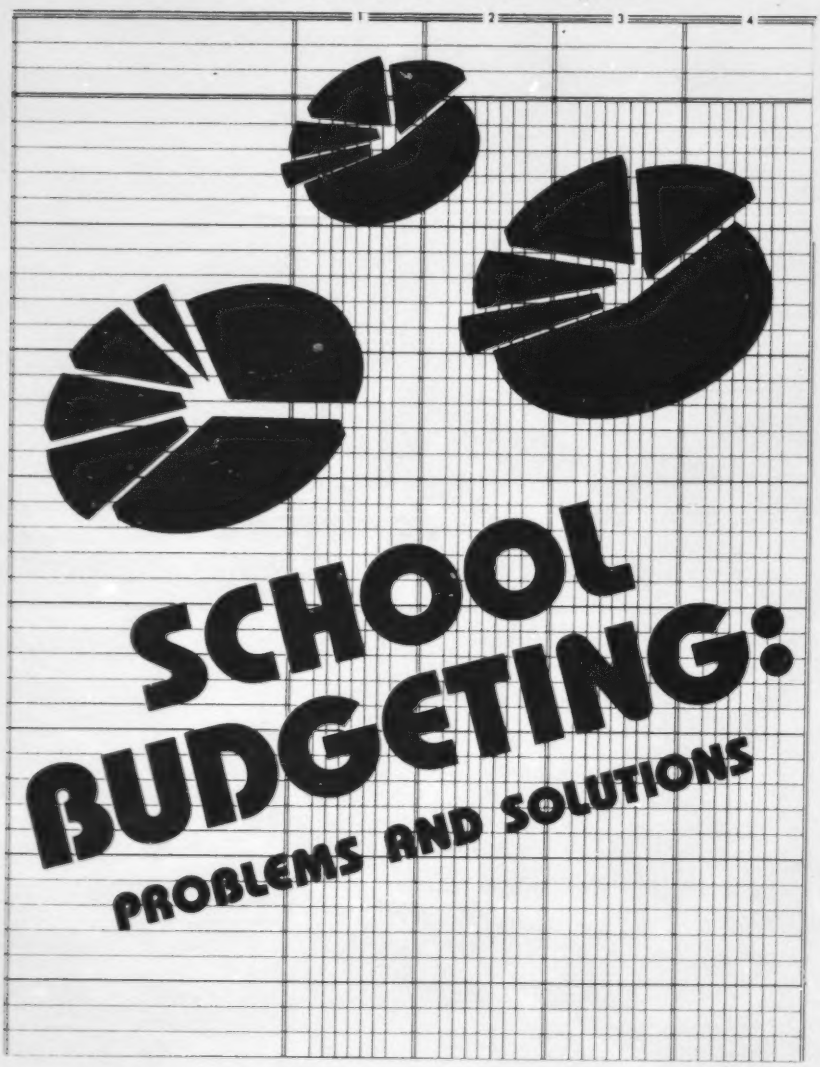
AASA Critical Issues Report



American Association of School Administrators

by Donald L. Hymes
Produced by
Education News Service
Sacramento, Calif.
for the
American Association of School Administrators

EA 014 327

The AASA Critical Issues Series

Many of the critical issues facing schools today are controversial. Some are new. None has a single best answer. Yet, administrators and boards of education must determine what is best for their communities. Realizing this, the American Association of School Administrators saw the need for a new series of in-depth reports to help administrators and boards make decision and solve problems.

This is the tenth report in the **AASA Critical Issues Series.** Like the others, it provides an in-depth look at the possible answers to a critical school problem. Special emphasis is placed on "how-to" suggestions from experts and successful programs, thus saving schools the costly and time-consuming effort of "reinventing the wheel." The goal is to help schools learn from the successes and failures of others in clear, non-jargon English.

Our thanks to all those who helped — administrators and other school personnel, school board members and experts in various fields.

The manuscript was written by Donald L. Hymes, an education writer based in Edgewater, Md.

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Copyright 1982, American Association of School Administrators
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 81-71069

Single copy, $10.95. Two to nine copies, 10% discount, 10 or more copies, 20% discount. Please add $1.50 to orders of $15 and under for postage and handling. Orders for less than $15 must be accompanied by payment in full. Order from AASA, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209. Stock No. 021-00900.

This report was reviewed by AASA and approved for publication. Approval does not signify that the contents reflect the views or policies of AASA.

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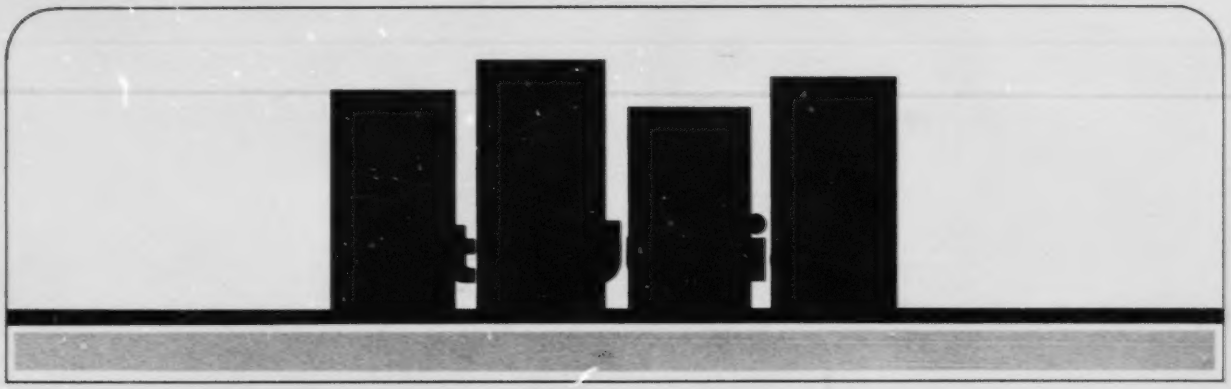
Chapter I



Even George Gallup himself couldn't have written a question with a more predictable response. "At the present time," AASA asked 1,700 of its members in a survey for this **Critical Issues Report**, "are the budget problems facing your district more serious than two years ago, less serious than two years ago, about the same as two years ago or no problem at all?"

Las Vegas oddsmakers wouldn't have taken a penny on that one. An overwhelming 76 percent of the respondents said their budget problems are *more serious*. A distant second was 19 percent for *about the same*, with 3 percent responding *less serious* and 2 percent reporting *no problem*.

The rest of the survey covered a variety of related topics that will be discussed throughout this report. What was so evident at the start, however, was the mood of 95 percent of the respondents: Things are bad, and they are not getting any better. A feeling of hopelessness, in fact, seemed to pervade many of the responses.

One question, for example, asked what had been effective in promoting understanding of the budget. More often than not, the answer was "nothing." The most universally adaptable suggestion, perhaps, was the one given by M.V. Nevereux, superintendent of the Buchanan (Mich.) Public Schools: "We pray a lot."

That could be good advice — if the problem emanated from heaven. Unfortunately the causes of today's school budget problems are entirely down to earth. Public schools, it seems, are being buffeted by a number of different factors that came together in the late 1970s and threaten to change the face of education as we know it before the end of the 1980s. Schools might be able to survive any one of these factors, but in combination they are exerting such pressures that educators all over the country are predicting disaster "unless those responsible come to their senses."

Who Is Responsible?

Here is a list of those who are often blamed for school budget problems:

- The federal government, which is cutting back its aid without cutting down on its mandates.
- The state government, which is limiting the amount of tax revenue a school district can raise or the amount of money it can spend, or both.
- Local property owners, who insist that property taxes are unreasonably high and that schools ought to be finding their money somewhere else.
- Members of the general public, backed to the financial wall by inflation and taxation, who feel that schools are not doing the job they are supposed to do and that more money will not result in better performance.
- A growing number of people (about 70 percent of American households) who have no school-age children and, consequently, no direct stake in public education.

The list of responsible parties could go on and on — pressure groups that force costly programs on school districts, or, at the other end of the spectrum, pressure groups that erode public confidence in schools; employee unions which many administrators and school boards accuse of greedily demanding top salary dollars at the expense of everything else in the school program; and federal and state bureaucrats, who heap mandates on schools but provide no money to comply with them.

School districts often fail to include one factor as the cause of their current financial crunch: themselves.

Materials gathered for this report and interviews

with many persons inside and outside school districts indicate that one cause of the financial problems of schools is inability or unwillingness to adequately explain their budgets. Especially now that times are tough, people want and need to know how school dollars are spent and the expected payoff.

This report focuses on those issues. Because specific problems differ so markedly from state to state, and even from district to district, individual concerns cannot be addressed. The direction of the report is simple and direct: Public school districts should be able to get their fair share of the tax dollar if they approach the funding authority — be it the school board, the local government or the taxpayers themselves — with reasonable, understandable and defensible budgets.

The purpose of this report, therefore, is to help school districts construct and "sell" such budgets. Doing so may well be a matter of survival in the 1980s, when the motto of public education may well become "sell or sink."

As noted in Chapter III of this report, "the days of drawing up a budget in the central office by tacking a percentage increase onto last year's line items, then running it past the school board, are gone."

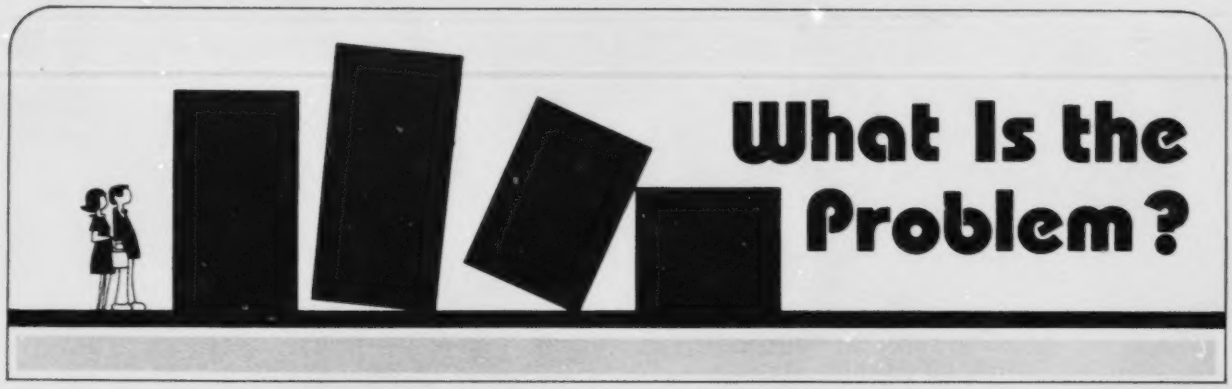
The emphasis in the budget-making process is shifting to the period before any concrete numbers are put on paper. What counts now, in the opinion of many respondents to the survey for this report, is involvement in the budget process — of staff, community, even students.

By involving many people, administrators say, they can more effectively get information on the proposed budget to the community. In addition, they say, people who are involved are usually committed to getting the budget passed. "We need all the help we can get," one superintendent noted.

Even those districts that do involve staff, students and outsiders often face difficult-to-answer questions and, sometimes, severe criticism. Community members and funding authorities may ask, for example: "Why is the cost of education going up when enrollments are dropping?" or "Why is the cost of education going up and quality going down?" For some help in answering these and similar questions from the tax-paying public, see Chapter XI.

Finally, this report addresses collective bargaining and lobbying as they relate to the school budget because of the sheer numbers of districts that are involved in or concerned about these topics.

Chapter II



What Is the Problem?

In a word, money. The well, which was so generous throughout the last decade, has almost run dry. The period between 1969 and 1979 saw total school revenues rise by 26 percent throughout the United States, according to a report issued by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). This translated into a per-pupil increase from $657 to $1,798 which, when adjusted for inflation, meant a real boost of nearly 40 percent. These were education's better years, which makes the sudden turnabout of the 1980s that much more dramatic.

The current national mood for curtailing government expense at all levels seems to have hit public schools the hardest. Why? In many areas, education is the one agency of government that citizens can influence most directly. The increased costs of local government due to inflation, plus the demand for services for elderly and handicapped citizens and for law enforcement, are causing a reduction in education's piece of the government pie.

In stark contrast to the 1970s, ECS states, the first school year of the 1980s saw expenditures for elementary and secondary schools fall as a percent of both the country's gross national product and its total personal income. These drops, adjusted for inflation and for declining enrollment, are real. And, according to the ECS report, they represent "an ominous beginning for the decade."

The thing to keep in mind is *not* that there is less money available for education. The money is there. The mood of the American public, however, is to give less of that money to government. In public education's effort to retain the portion of revenue needed to survive, it is finding itself on the short end of the balance sheet.

Why? Here are some of the reasons:

State Involvement

Schools have found few friends in the state capital. The survey for this report asked: "If you have serious budget problems, please explain why." The expected answer would be something like "income not keeping pace with needs." That was, in fact, the *second* most common answer to the question. Twice as many respondents cited "the state." This response, moreover, was given by administrators in almost every state.

More than half of the states in the nation, in fact, now impose some kind of fiscal limitations on the public schools. Some of them, like the landmark Proposition 13 in California or the more recent Proposition 2½ in Massachusetts, are having dramatic repercussions. In other cases, limits on taxation and/or spending enacted by state legislatures are not viewed as a catastrophe, but the long-range prospects, especially in tandem with inflation, are dismal.

State governments are becoming more involved in the governance of the public schools than ever before. This is most evident in California, where schools face severe revenue limitations and where, survey respondents complained, virtually all the shots are called by the State Legislature. School people realize that whoever controls the money calls the tune; consequently, they believe that states will show even more muscle as the federal government moves to extricate itself from entanglement in local education.

Concerned educators and local boards of education fear they will be hard-pressed to prevent state governments from stepping into the void created by withdrawal of the federal government. This concern is often voiced by Thomas A. Shannon, executive director of the National School Boards Association.

Shannon is apprehensive about moves in Washington to give more discretion in spending federal dollars to state and local boards. "This could lead to

a serious confrontation between state boards and departments of education, on the one hand, and local school boards and superintendents on the other, over the perennial issue of turf. State-level authorities," he added, "will be tempted to rush in with state regulations to fill the regulation void left by the federal retreat from the scene. Predictably, local school boards will oppose any effort of this sort on grounds that the intent of federal law was to deregulate, not merely shift regulation-making authority from the federal to the state level. The controversy this dispute could generate clearly will not be in the best interests of education."

Declining Enrollment

The descent of public education's star began just about the time the products of the post-World War II baby boom passed into adulthood, leaving vacant schools or half-empty classrooms in some areas. Declining enrollment brought its own special agonies, only some of which were financial.

In schools operating well under capacity enrollment, the cost of educating each child went up. As attendance dropped, so did revenue, yet fixed costs and districtwide overhead remained constant or even increased due to inflation. People in many districts in many parts of the country were unwilling to accept the fact that expenses could increase even as enrollment dropped.

Economizing by consolidating schools opened the door to another set of agonies. In many communities throughout the country, the process of closing schools became as divisive an issue as forced busing. Superintendents and school boards could not make decisions that pleased everybody and, while some districts had more success than others in finding an acceptable solution to dwindling enrollments, the bitterness engendered by the process remained. As a result, people in many communities showed their displeasure by replacing superintendents, recalling board members and withdrawing financial and vocal support for public schools.

Property Tax Revolt

Skyrocketing costs of necessities, house prices soaring out of the reach of many couples of even moderate income, "bracket creep," disillusionment with formerly respected leaders and institutions — certainly all these fueled the property tax revolt that started in California in 1978.

But another factor — especially important to schools and to school support — was the growing number of middle-aged and senior citizens who had no children in school. This ever-growing segment of the population, dubbed "nonparents" by educators, were the people most likely to vote, to own their own homes and to bear the property tax burden.

Some felt, no doubt, they had paid their dues to the schools and, as inflation ate great chunks of their paychecks or pensions, they saw no reason to pour money into educating other people's kids.

School people insist there has to be a better way to finance public schools than with the property tax. It alone, they reason, cannot keep pace with the rising cost of education.

The answer may come from state capitals. They could provide a needed buffer between school districts and local taxpayers, but the cure may bring with it many problems, according to some analysts.

Had enough? These are some of the major problems compounding and contributing to schools' financial problems, but there are others. The costs of energy, transportation and maintenance have risen even faster than the rate of inflation, putting tremendous pressure on school budgets. Mandates from state and federal governments, such as requirements to educate handicapped children, have not been relaxed, although in many cases the funding has.

Teachers, hit by inflation as hard as other workers, are demanding that their salaries keep pace with inflation. But since teacher salaries in many districts absorb nearly 80 percent of operating funds, these demands can be devastating to school budgets.

Public Confidence

Finally, and whether this is cause or effect is open to debate, public confidence in the schools dropped as steadily as the number of students throughout the last decade. In the Gallup poll of public attitude toward education, 18 percent of those polled gave the schools an A in 1974 compared to 9 percent in 1981. The schools rated a B from 30 percent of those polled in 1974 and from 27 percent in 1981. This lack of confidence, some observers argue, was not just reserved for the public schools. They noted that schools rated higher in confidence than all other government institutions, labor unions and big business. While there are some indications of a gradual recovery of public confidence in education, the relevance of the figures cited to the budget crisis of the 1980s should not be overlooked.

Here's another nagging question: Is lack of money the *real* cause of the budget crunch, or does the reason go far deeper?

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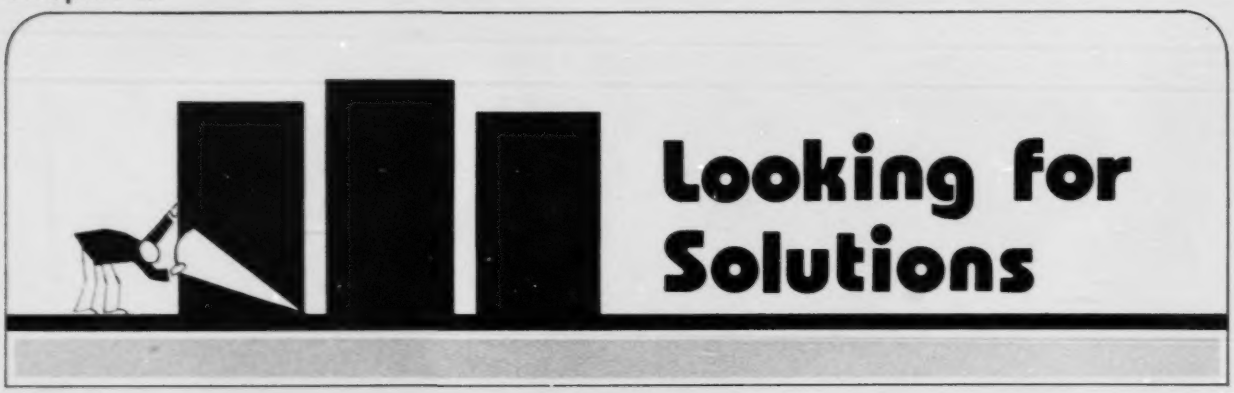
Chapter III



Looking for Solutions

Just as the previous chapter pointed out the complexities of the budget crisis, this chapter on solutions can be no less complex.

The days of drawing up a budget in the central office by tacking a percentage increase onto last year's line items, then running it past the school board, are gone. School districts that persist in compiling their spending plans in a vacuum, publishing a balance sheet in the local newspaper, then waiting for public approval may be doomed to disappointment. That process may have worked when enrollment and revenue were climbing steadily, most of the taxpayers had a direct stake in public education and the authority of the professional educator was unquestioned.

The situation is far different today, and the entire budget-making process must reflect the changes, if there is to be any hope of success.

This chapter and the ones that follow will detail the various steps school districts must take to earn themselves a fighting chance where it really counts: getting the money they need to operate.

Respondents to the survey for this report cited some techniques that worked for them. Among them:

1. Start the budget process earlier. In fact, as several respondents pointed out, the budget process never ends. As soon as one year's budget is adopted, the district should start working on the next one.

2. Involve more people. This, in fact, is the reason for the longer budget season. Get the public and the staff involved early in the *preparation* of the budget. Find ways to involve them formally in the process. Waiting until the budget is finished and then offering the staff and community a chance to give their suggestions will guarantee their apathy — and maybe their rejection.

3. Clarify what you intend to do with the money. In the old days, it might have been enough to say "more of the same," but now a large portion of the public give schools a low rating. If the budget process focuses only on numbers, the district stands a good chance of having the numbers slashed. If, however, the district focuses on children, the public will have second thoughts about wielding the ax.

4. Write a budget that everybody can understand — yes, everybody. Many districts have a standing joke that the budget is so complicated only two persons know what it really means and they don't dare travel on the same airplane. That may be all right if members of the board of education and the public are all CPAs, but if they are just plain folks, what better way to raise suspicion and resentment than to present a complicated, incomprehensible document and ask for unquestioning approval?

5. Relate the budget to the instructional program. If the school budget doesn't convey its purpose (i.e., to enable students to learn to read, write and compute and to prepare them for entering college or a job field), why should people approve it? Yet many budgets, covering several hundred pages of computer printout, never once mention the words "child" or "student."

6. Use all available means to spread the school message throughout the community. Some people need more detailed information than others, but *everybody* needs to know *something* about the district budget and how it will be used. A year-round program of honest, clear communication about the district's accomplishments and needs will pay off in increased public confidence and support.

Americans still rate public education as a high priority. In many cases, however, they fail to see the connection between school budgets and "education"

or between better educated students and a better community.

7. **Be accountable for district money.** This completes the cycle and gives the district a better-than-even chance of succeeding in the budget process, because it gives taxpayers a tangible return on their investment. Lacking any such accounting, the taxpayers may decide to put their money where they think it will do more good.

Together, these seven suggestions add up to a budget-making process that should be an integral part of every aspect of the school program. And why not? The budget is the life-blood of the day-to-day activities in every building. In some cases, however, the budget-making process has been an esoteric process generating a cryptic document handed down from the ivory tower to be accepted on faith.

The message here is simple: Those days are gone.

What About the Board of Education?

One of the most important and often most critical audiences for a school budget is the board of education, yet many districts need to more fully consider the needs of the board and its individual members in their budget process.

The law requires that at a certain time of the year the budget must be presented to the board of education. But, should that be the first time the board gets to see the budget? And does that mean

Superintendents must be budget-wise

'People Want To Know What We're Doing'

Supt. John F. Maloney of the Sharon (Mass.) Public Schools stresses the importance of "open dialogue" about the budget with staff, parents and community.

"From my experience, I think most people want to be assured that we have a rationale for determining costs and that these costs can be identified and justified within the budget."

Maloney said he has not found a need to refine individual costs for teaching each instructional item at every grade level, such as spelling, language arts, reading, science, mathematics and social studies for grade 3. "Information of that type is too sophisticated and serves no real public need," he noted. For the most part, he added, people are usually satisfied to know, for example, that one school bus costs $18,900 per year and that each bus makes three round trips per day carrying an average of 52 children at a cost of $6,300 per yearly round trip. "No defensible public need is served by a further refinement."

Superintendents must know the costs in their districts "and talk about education," Maloney advised. "Any superintendent with a knowledge of program costs has an advantage with the public since he can quickly speak about new or refined programs and how each will impact upon the budget. Many superintendents," he added, formerly prided themselves on being considered either a curriculum or budget expert. "Today, one needs to be both.

"The school system's methods for including cost controls and for sound business practices must be articulated," Maloney said. Why? "Society has forced a change in funding. Previously we enjoyed the luxury of determining good educational programs and budgeted the costs, knowing we would receive community support.

"Doing it for the 'good of children' no longer receives priority support," the Massachusetts superintendent explained. "Our best tack is to practice strong fiscal controls, and the support for new programs will follow. Public confidence in the fiscal operation of our public schools will be assured, provided we manage in accordance with sound business practices on a daily basis. Failing this, the general public can be expected to vote a lesser share of dollars for education, especially with declining enrollments, an aging voter population and economic anxiety."

that the format of the budget, and the items in it, are developed in isolation so that at the formal presentation the superintendent might as well hand the document to the president as a surprise?

The treatment described above obviously is not a good idea, and it could bring much grief to the superintendent. Several of the respondents to the survey for this report indicated the toughest audience they have to sell their budget to is their own board of education. If the board is puzzled, skeptical or surprised by the budget document, the blame will often be placed on the administration.

Here are some tips for keeping the board of education on the administration's side, compiled with the help of Ben Brodinsky, long-time education writer and a member of the Board of Education in Old Saybrook, Conn.:

✓ **Remember that the board is composed of plain people:** merchants, housewives, civil servants, doctors or lawyers. Only once in a great while does a real budget expert appear on the scene, so presentations for the board must be in terms *every* member can understand. Very often, members are reluctant to admit publicly they don't understand the budget. Consequently, the board president or that one budget "expert" asks questions and makes all decisions. That's bad. Make the budget meaningful to all and encourage participation by every member of the board.

✓ **Involve the board in the process at the very beginning.** Brodinsky suggested something that has worked successfully in his district: ask board members what they would like to see happen that year or two years ahead — without thinking about the price tag. Much of this "wish list" may not be feasible, he said, but it could result in getting the district out of a rut. Giving board members a chance to talk without worrying about money for once relieves them of their usual inhibitions. The superintendent often gains some good ideas that *can* work, which will, in turn, give board members a good feeling about the budget process.

✓ **Involve the board at several key points along the way, but make its role clear.** At one stage, the members would be "passive listeners" to staff presentations or advisory committee reports, while at another stage they would be encouraged to make informal suggestions. Later, those suggestions may become more formal. By the time the members get the budget for final deliberation and passage, they will feel more of a proprietary interest in it.

✓ **Regardless of budget format, keep the board supplied with accurate, clear information on the purpose of funding requests and the impact of proposed cuts — before the vote.** In an object budget with a large outlay of money earmarked for "instruction," board members may not understand what would happen if they lopped off a "mere" 10 percent. Don't *assume* they understand. Be responsive to their questions. Avoid educational jargon and generalizations that are not backed up with facts.

✓ **Above all, avoid surprises at the end of the budget process.** Board members feel, and rightly so, that they are responsible for the direction of the school district. They will react negatively if they think the administration is trying to put something over on them, or bypass their authority.

In these days of ever-tightening budgets, the administration and the board are on the same team. An adversary relationship will bring nothing but harm to the educational system.

Chapter IV

Budgeting Methods

Virtually everybody has seen the traditional line-item budget, the endless columns of figures that summarize in the grossest terms total expenditures "by object." Usually these budgets present "instruction" as a single item, "administration" as another, and so forth, in numbers so mind-boggling that it is impossible to fathom what each item means to classroom teaching.

Interestingly enough, 78 percent of the respondents to the survey for this report said they use line-item or object budgets in their districts. This raises the question: Could it be mere coincidence that 76 percent of the respondents said the budget problems facing their districts were "more serious" now?

Line-item or object budgets were created by accountants, and they served well over the years when funds were plentiful and public scrutiny was minimal. Many states still require school budgets to be drawn in a rigidly structured object format. Still, it is a format that generally defies understanding by citizens and staff.

Thus, as demands for accountability grew during the past decade, a number of alternate budgeting methods were developed, all of which are now evident to some degree, often in combination with each other, at state and local levels.

Here is a brief description of the five most common budgeting methods, according to Harry J. Hartley, professor of educational administration at the University of Connecticut at Storrs:

Program budgeting. Simply put, the idea is to plan budgets on the basis of curricular programs, to establish program priorities and plans, to develop objectives and evaluation criteria, to analyze alternatives and to relate program costs to accomplishments. The original planning-programming-budgeting system (PPBS) of the 1960s got mired down in paperwork and jargon and died out because there was no compelling reason to maintain it. A growing demand for accountability, however, brought a return to the program-oriented budget by whatever name — one that enables a district to show what the money pays for, and what the lack of money kills.

Zero-based budgeting. The aim here is to formulate each unit's annual budget from a base of zero. Each item must be justified. Thus, duplication and "nonessential" services can be eliminated. This concept is intended to prevent the incremental growth, or "budget creep" of the traditional school budget. It appeals to conservative legislatures and school boards who assume — mistakenly — that "zero-based" means "zero increase."

School-site budgeting. Each school, rather than each program, is a cost center, and the budget is developed mostly at the building level by the principal and his or her staff. It is based on the number of "weighted" students, curricular offerings and the district's allocation criteria. Just as current school finance reforms attempt to equalize resources among school systems within a state, this system attempts to equalize resources among buildings in a district.

Formula budgeting. Elements of formula budgeting have always been part of the process, but in these tight times the concept will be applied even more strictly by states and central offices to enhance their control. In the planning of each budget, allocation guidelines are issued for specific objectives of expenses such as textbooks, supplies and equipment. Principals must calculate personnel costs from a fixed pool of dollars and a fixed salary estimate for each position. In essence, this process is based on top-down assignments from the central office rather than bottom-up requests from teachers and principals. Little discretion or judgment is needed, Hartley pointed out, since budgeting becomes a mechanical process determined simply by head counts of pupils and formula allocations.

Index budgeting. This method is being used at the state level to establish ceilings on spending. In its simplest form, index budgeting sets a specific fiscal year as a base and prohibits any district from increasing its spending any more than necessary to match inflation, population increases or often just an arbitrary rate. This system is the easiest one for politicians to mandate, because it relieves them of the potentially explosive challenge of deciding which programs should be retained and which eliminated. It merely puts the onus on school districts themselves.

Current status: The evolution of the school budget of the 1960s has already shown evidence that each of the five formats will be incorporated in some degree into everybody's process. The line-item or object budget will probably live on because it seems to be the easiest way for the business manager and the computer to keep track of major accounts. But, in building a spending plan that the staff can support and the general public can understand, the traditional format may be inadequate. Hartley puts it very strongly: "If the average person does not understand the budget document and what it means for the student, it's worthless."

This report, therefore, will pay little attention to the presentation of the traditional line-item budget because it is, by and large, a relic of bygone days. Many districts resist changing to a program-related format by citing state requirements. Others, however, see that as an excuse. Many of the districts that have developed outstanding program-type budgets in recent years are in states that require object budgets. They merely publish two versions, one for the accountants in the state capital and one for everyone else. They realize that the conventional type of budget no longer furthers the cause of public schools because its perceived purpose is to obscure, rather than clarify, how the education dollar is being spent.

What Kind of Budget for You?

Many factors will go into answering that question: legal requirements, the size of the district, whether enrollment is growing or declining, the financial condition of the district, and whether the top administration is willing to toss tradition aside and embark on an unfamiliar road.

Obviously, if the district's current budget is working well, it should not be abandoned for the sake of "progress." From all indications, however, the traditional budget may not be adequate, and those school districts that retain it because "we've always done it that way" may be gambling with the future of their students.

No one suggests that districts try to transform overnight from the conventional line-item budget to a program budget. Changing a budget format means changing the mind-set of people, some of whose mind-sets have become so rigid that changing people may be required, too.

Allow ample time. Ideally, two or three years should be allowed for such a conversion. During the interim, parallel processes and even parallel documents will demonstrate comparability. But not until everybody is satisfied that the new budget format tells the story properly should the traditional budget book be relegated to the archives.

Changing a budget format requires re-education of the entire staff, and the process must start at home. Hartley, who consults frequently with school districts throughout the country on modernizing budget formats, believes it is impossible to impose the budget format used in one district on another district. A budget format should be developed from within, he said, or it stands a chance of failure.

Alternatives

Following are some alternative budget formats and techniques successfully used by some districts around the country. They are not necessarily included here as "classic" examples of one type or another, because really effective budgets incorporate elements of each.

Program Budgeting

It could be said that every budget is a program budget, and this is not as simplistic as it sounds.

If a program budget is defined as a spending plan tied to programs, then every school budget qualifies. The only problem is that a "program" of "educating children" is too broad to match with manageable spending strategies. This format begins becoming workable when the program is reduced to a definable segment of the overall educational system, one for which goals, priorities and activities can be established and evaluated.

A word of caution: The PPBS fad of a decade ago died out because so much bureaucratic energy was devoted to building goals, objectives, management plans and evaluation instruments that hardly anybody got around to developing an educational budget that made sense — and worked.

The program budget of the 1980s is, ideally, devoid of the jargon of its ancestor. It merely divides a total school budget into clearly identifiable

segments, each with a goal, objectives, activities and means of evaluating successes. Budget requests are applied to each program. Staff and other resources are allocated to enable activities to meet objectives. In this age of computers, re-assembly and compilation of program costs into an object budget should not be too difficult, if the need arises.

The key to putting a good program budget together is defining the program. This takes time. A school district contemplating a changeover should allow sufficient time — as long as three years — to develop programs, objectives and activities. The task does not have to be heralded with trumpets and loud promises of salvation. It would be better to be low-key and work from within. Ideally, the changeover will be directed by a staff person who will coordinate activities of small committees in each discipline, whose charge will be to define their programs and components.

As these programs are developed and refined, the previous year's object budget can be recast into program terms as a dry run. Problems can then be spotted and worked out before the district attempts to rely totally on the new technique. During the first year of full-fledged program budgeting, a parallel object budget should be developed, too. If nothing else, it will provide a feeling of security to make the first year of changeover that much less traumatic.

Program Budget #1: Westfield, Mass. A successful program budget has been in operation for several years in the Westfield (Mass.) Public Schools, where it has become doubly valuable. It is not only an effective tool for building a budget from the ground up, said James F. Shea, district business manager, but in the face of the potential devastation caused by passage of Proposition 2½, it also enables the administration to manage decline.

The budget of the Westfield district is divided into 35 separate programs, 23 of them instructional and 12 support, as follows:

Instructional Programs

Art — general art, sculpturing, art history.
Business education — typing, shorthand, law/economics.
Computer education — math/science, contracted services.
EPIC — science, environmental trips.
Foreign language — Spanish, French, Latin, German.
Guidance — counselors, materials.
Home economics — cooking, sewing.
Industrial arts — woodworking, mechanical drawing.
Kindergarten — half-day education.
Language arts — reading, writing, spelling, English 7-12.
Math — arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry.
Media services — audiovisual, librarian.
Music — instrumental, choral, classroom.
Instructional support — substitutes, inservice, severance pay.
Outdoor education — a self-supporting program.
Physical education/health.
Remedial reading — staff, supplies.
Science — biology, chemistry, physics.
Social studies — history, geography.
Student activities — athletics, intramurals, band, dance, debate.
Special education — all the programs under the state's special education provisions.
Bilingual — staff, textbooks, supplies.
Instructional resource center — audiovisual, printing.

Support Programs

Attendance — director.
Board of Education — negotiators, travel expenses, state dues.
Building management — principals, assistant principals, clerical staff and aides.
Central management — superintendent, assistant superintendent, business manager, directors.
Data processing — attendance, report cards, payroll.
Food service — self-supporting.
Insurance — fire, workers compensation, auto.
Maintenance of plant — painters, electricians, carpenters.
Operation of plant — custodians, utilities.
Transportation — regular, parochial and special trips.
Medical services — physicians, nurses.
Tuitions — state college agreements.

In the budget document itself, these program categories are totaled in a budget summary and also compiled in a "program budget crosswalk," which shows segments of the program costs devoted to items such as salaries, services, supplies and equipment. One column shows the percentage of the total budget set aside for each program. (In glancing at this column, community members would see, for example, that the largest percentage of the school budget — 12.9 percent — is spent for teaching language arts.)

Westfield Budget Crosswalk

The Westfield (Mass.) Public Schools includes in its budget document the following "Program Budget Crosswalk" to show the specific costs for each program and what percent of the total budget each program represents.

Westfield Public Schools
Program Budget Crosswalk
Budget Fiscal Year 1982

Program Description	Salaries 1,2,3	Services 4	Suppl-Matls 4	Other 6	Equipment 8	Total Expenses	Grand Total	Percent
Art	311,637	200	37,621			37,821	349,458	2.9
Attendance	14,581		100			100	14,681	0.1
Bilingual	47,699		2,705			2,705	50,404	0.4
Board of Education		15,800	889	1,500		18,189	18,189	0.2
Building Management	547,065	1,075	1,777			2,852	549,917	4.5
Business Education	187,308	2,100	7,750			9,850	197,158	1.6
Central Management	215,325	8,200	6,225			14,425	229,750	1.9
Computer Inst.	67,744	76,515	6,330		1,800	84,645	152,389	1.2
Data Processing	55,114	27,024	13,500			40,524	95,638	0.8
EPIC	33,359		3,115			3,115	36,474	0.3
Foreign Language	168,756	2,800	2,000			4,800	173,556	1.4
Guidance	239,598	1,000	15,388	200		16,588	256,186	2.1
Home Economics	147,411	600	6,614			7,214	154,625	1.3
Industrial Arts	183,391	1,575	24,480		2,973	29,028	212,419	1.8
Instr. Support	656,040	54,152	50,105	780		105,037	761,077	6.2
Insurance		81,291				81,291	81,291	0.7
Kindergarten	162,964						162,964	1.3
Language Arts	1,525,829		36,474			36,474	1,562,303	12.9
Maintenance Plant	216,639	91,160			74,395	165,555	382,194	3.2
Mathematics	702,883		9,185			9,185	712,068	5.9
Media Service - Lib.	137,187	725	36,145		409	37,279	174,466	1.4
Medical	56,472	9,038	2,150			11,188	67,660	0.6
Music	298,825	3,150	5,686			8,836	307,661	2.5
Plant Operation	587,699	260,645	682,792			943,437	1,531,136	12.6
Phys. Ed./Health	465,326		5,835		1,985	7,820	473,146	3.9
Reading - Remedial	117,994		6,322			6,322	124,316	1.0
Science	619,450	560	22,740		371	23,671	643,121	5.3
Social Studies	745,223		10,755			10,755	755,978	6.2
Special Education	664,166	289,721	17,150		11,000	317,871	982,037	8.1
Student Activities	84,458	25,716	19,555			45,271	129,729	1.0
Transportation		484,460				484,460	484,460	4.0
Tuition		166,658				166,658	166,658	1.3
Instr. Res. Ctr.	103,304	16,090	29,458	1,500		47,048	150,352	1.2
TOTAL	9,363,447	1,620,255	1,062,846	3,980	92,933	2,780,014	12,143,461	100.0

Westfield Program Summary

The Westfield (Mass.) Public Schools prepares a "Program Summary" for each of its programs. Note that the following summary breaks down the costs of the district's mathematics program by instructional levels, class hours and enrollees and that it includes a comparison of costs for the program for two years.

WESTFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PROGRAM SUMMARY
Budget Fiscal Year 1982

PROGRAM NAME	Mathematics	OBJECTS		
		Personnel	1, 2, 3	$ 702,883
CODE	13	Contract Services	4	
		Supplies	5	$ 9,185
LEVEL	K-12	Other	6	
		Equipment	8	
		TOTAL:		$ 712,068

BUDGET ANALYSIS	ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE	HIGH	TOTAL
Budget FY82	$232,380	$284,379	$195,309	$712,068
System-Wide Pupils	2,760	1,464	1,798	6,022
System-Wide Cost/Pupil	$84.20	$194.25	$108.63	$118.24
STAFFING ANALYSIS				
Number of Staff				
Professional	13	16	11	40
OTHER BUDGET ANALYSIS				
Students Enrolled	2,331	1,464	1,119	4,914
Cost per Enrollee	$99.69	$194.25	$174.54	$144.91
Class Hours	51,403	10,150	7,301	68,854
Cost per Class Hour	$4.52	$28.02	$26.75	$10.34

TWO-YEAR SUMMARY	FY81	FY82	Difference	Percentage
Total Personal Services	$696,213	$702,883	$ 6,670	1.0
Total Expenses	11,694	9,185	(2,509)	(21.5)
Grand Total	707,907	712,068	4,161	.6

A percentage guideline is used to price out the money actually spent in salaries for instructional subjects in the elementary schools. Here is a sample time allocation chart used by Westfield. The figures would vary district by district and even school by school, if circumstances warrant:

	% of Time Allocated To Instructional Areas	
	grades 1-3	*grades 4-5*
Language arts	59	45
Mathematics	12	14
Social studies	6	13
Science	5	11
Physical education	8	8
Art	5	5
Music	5	4
	100	100

Thus, the mathematics program budget for the 6,022 students in grades K-12 involves 40 staff members for a total cost of $712,000, or $118 per student. It is also broken down into an hourly cost, which is $10.34 per class hour.

A similar breakdown is prepared for each program. Every cent seems to be accounted for, which is the whole idea.

Preceding each program's budget page is a full-page, single-spaced "program profile," which is divided into the following categories: current activities, major goals, recent accomplishments and program needs. The program profiles are not made up of platitudes about mathematics that could show up in any budget in any given year. Instead, specific activities are described: discussions of programs being offered to students in certain grades and the results of recent tests.

The section on program needs, therefore, becomes the justification for budget requests, such as curriculum development or inservice on a specific topic. Only the "major goals" which set down the overall purpose for a mathematics program could stand from year to year. Otherwise, the document contains current information that gives life to a school budget and shows exactly how the money is spent.

In addition to the overall budget document, an "Analysis and Budget" brochure is published for the various programs. These booklets, each put together by a committee of teachers plus one administrator, include the rationale, goals, a curriculum development flow chart, objectives, constraints, evaluation process, evaluation criteria and program description. In the case of math, the booklet is 10 pages long and leaves little doubt of what the math program is all about.

Since Massachusetts is one of those states that still requires budgets to be the line-item object type, the Westfield computer is programmed to produce that information, too. In fact, printouts are available to show not only the program breakdown, but costs by traditional line items, by individual schools and by object codes as well. Business manager James Shea had a quick answer for school districts that resist changing to a program budget because the law requires line-item reports: "Do as we do. Do both."

A detailed budget manual is sent to all staff members who are expected to make requests, complete with guidelines, constraints, samples and details from previous years.

Note: The more help a district can offer principals or department directors, including standardized forms to put their budget requests together, the easier it is to compile the information in the budget document.

Program Budget #2: Waukegan, Ill. The Waukegan (Ill.) Public Schools publish an extensive series of memorandums from the central office to walk principals and other administrators through the budget process. It tells what programs are to be considered separately and how their costs are to be determined — including how to estimate salaries and how to estimate the costs of standard supplies and equipment.

The allocation of teacher time in the elementary schools is handled as follows in Waukegan:

	% of Time Allocated To Instructional Areas	
	grades 1-3	*grades 4-6*
Art	4	3
Career education	2	3
English	17	20
Health	3	4
Mathematics	19	20
Music	2	2
Reading	39	27
Science	6	9
Social studies	8	12
	100	100

In addition to subject areas such as these, program budget worksheets are required from each school for co-curricular activities, attendance, counseling and the principal's office.

Supt. Don T. Torreson stresses that the district strives for accuracy in its projections. Take for example, class sizes. The district provides principals with enrollment estimates early in the budget process so they can actually set up classes and determine staffing needs. "That way we know how many kids there will be in each subject," Torreson explained. "The board is made aware of under-enrolled courses, and we can decide whether to eliminate those courses or absorb the added cost of teaching them."

There are probably as many different versions of program budgets as there are districts publishing them. But that is far healthier than the trend of a decade ago, the experts say, when PPBS budgets were forced into such a rigid format that they lost their identity as school spending plans. Adapting the program format to the size and style of a district, its administration and its board makes more sense. Further, using the broad definition of program budget, the following examples of zero-based and school-site budgets are no less "program" than those just described.

Zero-based Budgeting

This concept gained prominence in the late 1960s in the federal government and tended to sweep over educational institutions. Hartley issued a word of caution about zero-based budgeting (ZBB) in an article in the *NASSP Bulletin* in December 1979: "Some ZBB proponents promise more than they can deliver and underplay potential misuses of the concept, such as creating excessive paperwork and forms, reducing staff morale and overemphasizing quantification in the evaluation of instructional programs." Still, if handled properly, ZBB can be used to improve the planning process, control expenses and justify spending, Hartley noted.

Basically, ZBB exerts greater control over spending by requiring a justification for *every* proposed expenditure, beginning theoretically from a base of zero. This is a marked change from the traditional incremental style of budgeting, where the focus is on requested increases — and occasionally decreases — over the previous year, but the "base" is given little scrutiny. ZBB requires program managers to start fresh each year with new rationales, objectives and evaluation criteria, and to request resources and alternate levels of service for each program.

ZBB in Romulus, Mich. One school system that has embraced zero-based budgeting is the Woodhaven School District in Romulus, Mich., which houses 5,000 students in 10 buildings. Supt. June Gabler believes ZBB is "more effective because it involves all staff and requires review of program objectives."

The budget season is about five months long in Romulus, starting in December with a memo to the staff outlining the process:

"All staff members in the Woodhaven School District are expected and encouraged to be involved in preparing preliminary budget requests .... They should also be aware that funding for programs is limited and that they need to be creative in suggesting means by which they can perform Level I programs with less funding. ZBB assumes no dollar figure for anything; rather, it identifies levels of program and content and quality, and it attaches costs necessary to implement those various levels."

Woodhaven identifies three levels of services:

- Level I is the *minimal* level of operation, retaining the status quo. Materials that are worn out can be replaced, but the program is not enhanced. This level does, however, allow for growth and economic changes, like inflation.
- Level II is the *facilitating* level of operation, allowing programs to be enriched. It is also the level on which new programs are developed, either as support systems for other programs or as entirely new and complementary to existing programs.
- Level III is the *optimum* level of operation, allowing programs to operate with the most desirable conditions, including class-size ratios, materials, space.

The district uses three different types of forms as part of its ZBB system: *Form A* is a needs statement, requiring written documentation justifying the proposed expenditure of funds for each line item. *Form B* provides line item cost factors for an administrator's budget, including the building's total budget. It is divided into historical data (two or three years' experience is considered helpful for estimating the present need), an explanation of changes for Levels I and II, and a description of all employees assigned to the building. *Form C*, which must be accompanied by Form A, is used for all requests for purchase orders, describing the vendor, the level and the rationale for need.

The district sets forth procedures to be followed by staff members, starting with teachers and custodians in each building. The district guidelines note, for example, that teachers are concerned with five accounts: bulk teaching supplies, other teaching supplies, bulk media supplies, textbooks and audio-visual materials. Teachers must account for almost all items by program in their budget requests; only "bulk supplies" may be listed as a total, without reference to a specific program.

Principals, the district notes in its guidelines, "should expect staff to justify and defend all requests for funds." It adds: "This is not a question of integrity and trust. Principals are expected to defend expenditures, and not having the necessary documentation makes it more difficult the further one is removed from the classroom setting."

The district notes further that budgets must be defended and justified by the assistant superintendents, business manager, superintendent and eventually the board of education.

The final budget document, after weeks or months of synthesizing and modifying, may not look a great deal different from a traditional line-item budget. If the actual justification forms are included in the document, however, the reader can get a clear picture of what factors have combined to create the district budget. This type of approach, school budget experts note, is most effective when it is carried a step further, and each school becomes a "cost center" under a school-site budgeting process.

Morton, Ill.: modified ZBB. Many districts that moved to ZBB early in the game have edged away from it recently for various reasons. Several administrators noted in their responses to the survey for this report, for example, that while ZBB was effective in cutting back spending, it was ineffective in providing for needs. "You know you have to have certain things," said Norman Durflinger, assistant superintendent in Morton, Ill., in explaining why his district has moved to what is being called "modified zero-based budgeting."

Again, principals are responsible for formulating their own budgets. They submit a request with items listed in priority order, noting whether the requests allow for maintenance or improvement of programs. From these forms, the school budget is compiled. If a school's budget is too high when compared with other schools in the district, its principal makes the cuts, using the teachers' priorities as a guideline.

In other words, Morton schools do not start with zero, but priorities and rationales are still required for all programs. As Durflinger explained: "I will not give a line-item figure. I don't think the district should set the budget. The teachers should set it."

ZBB as used in Caledonia, Minn. This district applies the ZBB concept specifically to requests for supplies and textbooks from its 83 teachers, according to Supt. Miles H. Miller.

Miller explained: "Teachers always thought that they had the same dollars. They'd always spend that amount and add more." Under the new system, he said, there are no dollars guaranteed. Teachers must identify what they need for specific programs, and the cost.

"I feel we have been able to hold budgets down and avoid wild spending," Miller related. "In the past, if money were left over in a department budget, teachers would rush out to find something to buy just so they could go over by a few dollars and form a justification for next year's request. Now they're pretty careful; they do a lot of planning and they're more responsible in the way they order and use what they receive." The turnaround in attitude came, the superintendent noted, "the first time we said 'no.'"

School-site Budgeting

In one sense, this type of budgeting is the ultimate in accountability and equality. It puts control of the education dollar right where it's spent and where the results will be most obvious. And it represents a mathematically fair way for a district to guarantee that each of its students gets the benefits of equal resources. As in other forms of budgeting, there are widespread differences of opinion over its effectiveness, especially in questions of whether principals and school staff have the time and the expertise to become budget managers. Still, many districts see school-site budgeting as the answer to current problems.

Fairfield, Conn.: enthusiastic supporter. One district that has embarked enthusiastically on a program of school-site budgeting is the Fairfield (Conn.) Public Schools, with 12 schools and just over 8,000 students.

John Greenhalgh, assistant superintendent for business, outlined the way the system works. Generally, he said, funds available for the support of schools are parceled out to each school building on a per capita basis, with weightings assigned to each specialized group of students, such as handicapped or gifted, as well as varying requirements of different grade levels. Each school decides how funds will be used for maximum educational opportunities for each person in the school. The planning process requires input from students, staff and members of the community.

Fairfield Breaks Down Costs by Individual Schools

The budget document of the Fairfield (Conn.) Public Schools shows exactly how each school is spending the money allotted to it. The costs are broken down by staff, books and materials, supplies and support services.

Support services are not charged to individual school building allotments. Rather, they are separately budgeted by the central office. Nevertheless, the budget document includes a breakdown of these costs in order to present a true picture of school costs.

Holland Hill Elementary School — 423 # of pupils — $732,293 Allocation

	Students	Teachers
K	53	1.0
1	68	3.0
2	52	2.0
3	51	2.0
4	58	3.0
5	69	3.0
6	62	3.0
SpEd Resource	29	1.0
SpEd Intensive	10	1.0
Art		.5
Reading		1.0
Health/P.E.		.8
Music		.8
String Inst.		.1
Speech/Hring.		.4
Gifted		Prin.
Librarian		.6
Principal		1.0
Psychologist		.8
Secretary		1.0
Teacher Aide		.8
Library Aide		.4
Sp. Ed. Aide		2.0
Custodian		2.0
Teacher Subs.		124 Days
Lunch Aide		232 Hours
		$720,911
Staff Costs	$720,911	
Weighted Enroll.	432.15	1,668.20

	Books and Materials	Supplies
Office	—	100
General	—	100
Kinder.	350	100
Art	—	300
Reading	1,975	650
Health/P.E.	100	550
Math	1,450	100
Music	150	300
Science	300	450
English	1,850	—
Soc. Stud.	500	100
Library	200	100
Testing	100	—
Sp. Ed.	750	—
OTHER EXPENSES		
Copying		100
Prof. Books		50
Conf./Meetings		50
T.V. Membership		80
Extra Curr. Transp.		425
Toll Calls		102
	$7,725	$3,657
Materials/Supplies	$11,382	
Weighted Enroll.	432.15	26.34

Support Services	
Attendance and Social Worker Services	3,800
Supplies	
Art	1,756
Custodial	1,625
General School	4,047
Health & First Aid	153
Library & Media	393
Daily Transportation	29,028
Tutoring	427
Repairs	
Art	27
Music	343
Physical Education	122
Office Machines	285
General Custodial	6,411
Maintenance	24,256
Specified Maintenance	901
Gifted Program	1,414
Instructional Supervision	17,973
Media Program	2,776
Psychological Program	2,343
Special Pupil Transportation	9,358
Speech & Hearing	6,642
Substitutes, Extended	2,138
Electricity	12,350
Fuel	25,034
Gas	190
Refuse Removal	720
Telephone	1,115
Water	1,394
	$157,021*

* This figure is not included in school's allocation of $732,293.

The process begins in early September when the superintendent gathers statistics on the future needs of the school system. This information is reviewed with parent group leaders, legislative authorities and the board of education. Ultimately, the superintendent arrives at an overall budget limit, taking into consideration such factors as existing or contemplated labor agreements, the state of the economy, enrollment projections, program needs and community aspirations.

Once the target is established, the budget-building process begins at the building level. First, funds are set aside to cover those centralized activities that should not be assigned to a single school unit: central administration, community education, centralized maintenance and data processing services, transportation, business affairs and general supervision.

Next, all other funds are allocated to individual school buildings so principals can compile a budget on which the school will run for a full year. Schools must provide in their budgets for all staff, materials, programs and operating expenses.

To avoid the bias of seniority-based pay scales, all job categories are dealt with in averages. The central business office publishes the mean salary for each category of employee. Schools use those averages exclusively in developing their staffing patterns. In most cases, positions can be listed by fractions if schools require less than full-time services.

Schools receive several items to help them in their planning effort:

- An accurate forecast of anticipated enrollment by each category of student.
- A funding allocation for each type of student and the combined total building allocation.
- A prepared list of average mean salaries for each type of employee likely to be employed within the school.
- Budget forms that enable each school to construct a complete spending plan for the money it gets.

Schools are encouraged to be innovative in their use of resources. Fixed patterns are only those prescribed by labor contracts, statutes, board policies and administrative regulations. Schools do the hard planning, while the board of education acts in a policy-making role.

After the schools have constructed their budgets using average salaries, the business office converts the data back to real salaries based on the people and positions in each school. The final budget is presented in actual salaries and expenses.

Decentralizing the budget-building process permits each school to deal with a manageable and understandable entity, Greenhalgh feels. "Parents can assimilate the costs of operating a single neighborhood school. Their interest is piqued in that sphere. They understand and support the budget which they help create."

The community has been extremely pleased in the resulting grassroots budget-building process, Greenhalgh said. He believes that budgets made nearest the students yield the best decisions. They tend to be customized and fit the need of each student rather than being averages of systemwide decisions, he said. Also, each pupil is assured of having equal access to educational resources. Each school, regardless of neighborhood affluence, receives equal resources per capita, Greenhalgh noted.

The final budget document issued in March is, in fact, many budgets under one cover. It is appropriately titled, "The Budgets of the Fairfield Schools." Included are districtwide summaries and totals by object of each of the eight schools — program by program — with the prorated support services on facing pages. Each school's budget shows staff members in various grades and program categories, plus supplies, books and materials by subject area.

There is, in other words, no cushion evident in this kind of budget. Every cent is allocated for a specific purpose in a specific school. Any proposed cut would have to come out of a program in a school — not from an amorphous mass of dollars labeled "Instruction."

Sanborn, N.Y.: school-site budgeting plus evaluation. Going a step further than the Fairfield district is the Niagara Wheatfield Central School District, Sanborn, N.Y. It builds a budget for six schools, with separate budget workbooks and work sessions before the board.

As in Fairfield, staffing and supplies are listed subject by subject for each school, with one addition: a section entitled "Program Evaluation." A current budget noted, for example, that the grade 3 reading scores at Colonial Village Elementary School were excellent, that the math scores had been increasing each year until two years ago and that "the current class produced an uncharacteristically small group of scores in the high achievement range."

Four pages of this school's budget are set aside for analyzing the standardized test data and relating the findings to the budget itself. This is done by

Tips on Changing from an Object to a Program Budget

One of the most successful efforts in transforming an object budget into a program budget began in 1977 in the Westfield (Mass.) Public Schools.

The changeover was necessary, explained James F. Shea, business manager, for two reasons: (1) to explain to the public what they really wanted to know: what things cost; and (2) to shift the emphasis from salaries as a line item to specific educational programs.

Shea offers these tips to districts contemplating a changeover to a program budget:

✔ **Obtain strong commitment from the top school administration.** If everybody, especially the superintendent, is not sold on the idea, consider bringing in an outside expert to explain the value of this type of approach. But don't expect an outsider to do all the work and deliver a neatly wrapped package. The bulk of the work must be done by those inside the district.

✔ **Get the commitment of the board of education.** Westfield officials made a formal workshop presentation to board members to show, for example, that the proposed reporting forms would not eliminate the object budget totals, as they feared, and at the same time the forms would break down costs into manageable categories. Finally, by inclusion of program profiles, the board was assured that each program would be accountable for its budget.

✔ **Be prepared to rely heavily on the district computer** or on a service bureau if necessary. Access to a computer assures the wide variety of reports and "crosswalks" that make a program budget such a valuable tool. The coding system should allow the district to obtain costs in whatever variety of combinations may be required.

✔ **Gain the support of the teachers union in the project.** Make clear that the new system will not be used to evaluate teachers.

✔ **Ask the board of education for a formal resolution supporting the beginning of the program-budgeting process.** The resolution should specify the approximate amount of time needed to fully establish the process. (Three to four years is about right.)

✔ **Prepare the curriculum director and the business manager** (or assistant superintendent for business) for their roles in the changeover. They will have to spend a great deal of time on the project the first couple of years. The curriculum director must coordinate the efforts to compile program descriptions, while the business manager takes charge of the financial details of the change. Their time will be well spent, Shea stressed, because their work will enable district officials to answer questions about the budget faster and easier.

✔ **Don't expect much more the first year than a companion document,** or a section in the object budget, showing a statistical analysis of certain programs with their costs attached. These could be in the broadest terms, such as "elementary education" or "secondary education."

✔ **To prepare for the second year,** hold inservice workshops for program directors to explain the process. Then, put them to work writing program narratives.

✔ **Incorporate one or more programs into the budget process itself** in the third year. Depending on how well the program directors do, at least one academic subject can be included in the budgeting process from beginning to end to show how the system will work.

Finally (in the fourth year in Westfield's case), the district is ready to put the entire budget into program terms, including a "budget crosswalk" that gives summaries of items such as salaries, supplies, equipment, as well as total program costs. But don't forget the traditional object summary page, too.

Don't overlook the importance of the evaluation aspect, Shea advised. "It's the toughest part of the process," he said. It can also be the most important part because it shows where the dollars should go and where they have had an impact in the past. A district that sloughs off the challenge of evaluation, Shea cautioned, invites questions of whether taxpayers are getting their money's worth.

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answering four questions for each set of data:

1. What trends in student achievement are apparent in the data?
2. What instructional content is in need of emphasis?
3. How does your proposed program budget reflect these needs?
4. What are the possible long-range implications of these trends for district instructional programs?

Once again, by relating budget requests to the learning process, showing what weaknesses the budget is intended to overcome and past results, the financial request becomes more understandable and justifiable.

In addition, school-site budgeting offers another advantage: It makes clear where the money is going.

Note: Representatives of several districts that use school-site budgeting mentioned a mutual problem: As principals assumed more budget responsibility, board members expressed resentment or fear of loss of power. Such internal problems would have to be worked out by districts wishing to switch to school-site budgeting. The board of education, after all, is the ultimate funding authority in nearly two-thirds of the nation's school districts. An extensive education effort, directed at board members, might be in order to explain the many benefits of alternative budgeting processes.

Another point to keep in mind: Whether the budget is built from the school level up — as in the examples of program and zero-based budgeting — or allocated to each school by the central office, principals should be held accountable throughout the school year on how they implement their building's budget. Many school districts send expenditure analyses at least monthly to principals so they can monitor their spending and be aware of what's left. If the money runs out before the school year ends, problems may ensue.

Chapter V

Developing the Budget

The key word is "developing." A budget doesn't just happen. It doesn't just spew out of a computer. It evolves over a period of months, with opportunities for everybody involved — often including the consumers — to contribute ideas.

The most critical part of the budget process, in fact, may be the period before any concrete numbers are put on paper. Some respondents to the survey for this report who claimed success in putting together their district budget attributed it to one word — involvement. That means school staff (teachers and principals as well as central office administrators) and citizens (as members of advisory committees or participants in public forums or surveys). This may sound more like public relations than budgeting, but it works.

School staffs that have had a part in formulating the budget will be more inclined to support it. Administrators and boards should never underestimate the influence a school employee carries in his or her own neighborhood. Similarly, citizens who are involved in the budget process will have a proprietary interest in working toward its approval later. Today, a school district needs all the help it can get.

The Timeline

The budget process should be planned — preferably for the entire year. The first step is to draw a timeline: what is to be done, when and by whom. The timeline should be published widely — and followed.

Drawing up a universal timeline is impossible, because the requirements of budget adoption differ significantly from state to state and district to district. The timeline for a budget which goes from the business manager to the superintendent to the school board should be completed in about two months. The more stops along the way and the more participation and involvement of people, however, the longer the process will take.

Those survey respondents who felt a longer timeline contributed to their success settled on an average of nine months, roughly coinciding with the school year. A number of them said the process used to last six months or less until money became tighter. Then, they decided to involve more people even earlier in the budget-making process.

Take, for example, the Sharon (Mass.) Public Schools, a district of seven schools and 3,000 students in a state devastated by the passage of Proposition 2½. Supt. John F. Maloney sees the budget process as the "closing of a loop," which includes setting goals, working them into a budget, reviewing what's been accomplished and changing priorities if needed. As for the district's timeline, Maloney said, "We never stop! As soon as one budget is completed, we start to consider and identify items for the next one. The formal process starts in October, and the school committee presentation is made in December for action by town meeting in April of the next year."

Here is the calendar used by the Sharon district in developing its annual budget:

June-July Staff and administrators review preliminary needs for textbooks, supplies, equipment for the next school year.

Aug.-Sept. Staff and administrators review school board goals to determine need for new textbooks, supplies and equipment.

Sept.-Oct. Building principals and staff prepare budget requests according to program budget format.

Sept.-Oct. Building principals seek parent input to suggest program changes for inclusion in new budget.

Nov. Preliminary budget requests must be submitted to superintendent by November 1 of each year.

Nov.-Dec. Superintendent reviews all preliminary budget requests with appropriate staff.

Dec. Superintendent presents first draft of budget to school board at second meeting in December (between 15th and 22nd).

Jan.-Feb. School board conducts open public budget discussions as part of its regular meetings. Staff, parent and community involvement encouraged.

Mar. School board tentatively approves budget for next school year; meets with town fiscal advisory board to explain its proposed budget.

Mar.-Apr. School board holds special evening meeting to explain budget to community. Input from general public is again welcomed.

Apr. School board adopts final draft of budget and presents it to voters at annual town meeting for adoption.

Apr.-June Old budget is phased out and new one is implemented.

The larger the district, the more administrative steps, with staff members designated as "department directors" or "business manager" or "assistant superintendent" getting into the act.

In those areas where collective bargaining is a fact of life, that factor must be cranked into the calendar as well. Experts note, however, that the

A Survey of Staff Members Proves Valuable

If you want to know what staff members feel is important, why not ask them?

That's what Charles L. Cummins Jr., superintendent of the Laurens County School District in Clinton, S.C., decided to do. He found it a valuable step in the budget-making process.

Cummins designed a "Budget Planning Survey" to be sent to all staff members early in January. He emphasized that the completion of the survey was optional, although those who filled it out had to sign their names.

Almost 45 percent of the teachers in the seven-school district responded, and some of the answers were surprising. "Staff members know the realities," Cummins reported. "Believe it or not, the salary question came out 50-50. Fifty percent said they would be willing to keep the present salary schedule."

"There's not a whole lot of leeway (in the budget)," Cummins said, but the survey helped considerably in determining how uncommitted funds should be spent. In the first year the survey was made, for example, the district attained two new activity buses and improved library resources. "Most important," the superintendent said, "the survey makes teachers feel they have a part in budget decisions."

One word of caution: "You've got to give feedback to those surveyed," Cummins noted. "Tell them the results." And, he added, "if you can't come through with their priorities, explain why. Just don't let the survey results languish in some file cabinet back in the office, or nobody will ever take a survey seriously again."

A final note from the South Carolina superintendent: The last question on the survey asked for volunteers willing to serve on committees outside school hours to address current problems. This question attracted 26 volunteers who "would like more input into the decisions that are made in their schools and the district as a whole," Cummins said.

degree of involvement and input *before* negotiations get serious can help set the negotiators' parameters and, in fact, let the school district know just how far the public is willing to go in funding the school budget.

Involving the Staff

One of the most direct ways to involve staff members in the preparation of the budget is to ask them, right down to the individual classroom teacher, what they will need to operate next year. This system will vary depending on the size of the district, but generally teacher requests are screened by department heads and/or principals and forwarded to the person in the central office responsible for compiling the budget itself.

This system should not be confused with school-site budgeting, although it starts the same way. School staff involvement in the development of the budget does not necessarily mean school-site management of the funds, although it can, and some districts have successfully used both concepts.

Districts that have had success involving individual teachers in making budget requests offer these suggestions:

- **Make teachers justify the items they want to buy.** Don't accept a request for, say, "$500 for chemistry supplies." Give teachers catalogs and have them identify what they want. Not only does this avert the tendency to round off requests to a higher figure, but it assures that everybody knows how much things cost.

- **Make sure teachers understand the district's financial situation** before they start compiling their wish lists. Failure to do so can result in bitterness and disappointment when "dreams" are not realized. Leonard T. Burns, superintendent of the Bellflower (Calif.) Unified School District, advises administrators to make every effort to inform employees of revenue problems. "I believe the information that you distribute to them develops a mind-set of restraint and retrenchment, which prevents unions from painting a rosy picture."

- **While it may not be possible to carry each request as a line item** in the eventual budget, keep each as identifiable as possible throughout the process. That way, each staff member can feel a personal stake in the budget.

Remember, the motive for involving teachers is not only to learn what they will need to teach next year. Another motive is to make them a part of the process and thus a staunch ally during budget adoption time, when their help will be invaluable.

Involving the Principal

The principal is becoming more important in the budget development process as well as functioning as the on-site manager of the allocation itself. How this affects the principal's traditional role as curriculum leader is a matter of debate; nevertheless, without strong leadership at the business end, there may be little left with which to manage instruction.

Recruiting the principal's help early in the process is more than a method for involvement. For one thing, it puts the focus where it belongs — on the classroom. This gives the principal a new role in many cases: actually compiling the dollars needed to run the school for a year. Note, however, that principals do not always welcome this role.

"My major innovation has been in attempting to decentralize the decision-making process with respect to budget development," said Paul H. Cunningham, superintendent of the Dorchester County (Md.) Public Schools. "Principals seem to welcome this added flexibility over their educational resources. They are reluctant, however, to assume the added responsibility (accountability) for the results."

The latter point is the key. Principals should have an opportunity to explain use of the school's money and how it affected the achievement of their students. Therefore, this becomes more than a budgeting step. It focuses public attention on the teaching of children and brings the budget process closer to home — the voters' home.

Involving the Public

"We found a long time ago that if you want to get something done, involve as many people as you can as early as you can."

In this case, the "something" is the adoption of a school budget, as described by J. Dan Bushardt, assistant superintendent of the Florence County (S.C.) School District No. 3. The method is the 100-year tradition of a citizens meeting.

In Florence County, school building advisory councils, including parents and students, meet monthly to make suggestions. Eventually, nearly 800 people attend a public meeting where they vote for board members and a budget.

The Clackamas County School District, Canby, Oreg., uses building budget committees to review needs and programs in each school. "This involves more community members, which generally devel-

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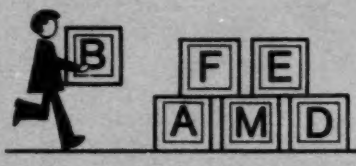
ops more support for the overall budget," said Supt. E.R. Miller.

Here is how the system works in Clackamas County:

- A committee of parents for each building reviews the budget with the principal and suggests what it would like to see in the school.
- These same people sit in on hearings later when each school's budget is combined into the district budget. They may be called on to go back to their school community to explain — or even sell — cuts that have to be made at the school level.
- When the proposed spending plan goes to the districtwide "budget committee," composed of board and community members, the parents are on hand again to explain their rationale and answer questions. "When knowledgeable citizens are sitting out there being advocates," Miller explained, "it helps that much more."
- Upon return of the budget to the school, the principal reviews it with the budget committee and works out necessary cuts. The principal maintains authority, Miller emphasized, but the involvement of the parents at this step in the process insures continuing public support. This is especially important to a district like Clackamas,



What's Important in Drawing Up a Budget?

Attention Superintendents:

Do you wonder what criteria are considered most important by your counterparts when they are drawing up their budgets?

Michael H. Ferry, a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut at Storrs, asked Connecticut superintendents to rank 15 factors in the order they considered most relevant in making budget decisions.

You may want to rank the factors and compare your rankings with those of the Connecticut superintendents.* The factors are:

A. *Number of clients affected:* analysis of program enrollment, class size, cost per pupil.
B. *Collective bargaining contract provisions:* expenditures specified in the bargaining agreement.
C. *Impact of matching funds:* interdependence of local spending pattern and federal matching funds.
D. *Administrator's judgment and intuition:* professional judgment, personal experience and individual style.
E. *Governing board fiscal policies:* priorities, policies and goals of the board of education.
F. *State and federal laws and regulations:* programs and activities required by government agencies.
G. *Non-client expenditures:* instructional vs. non-instructional areas, i.e., deferred maintenance.
H. *National and regional curricular trends:* factors that influence curricular programs and staffing patterns.
I. *Internal-organizational political pressures:* demands by board of education, staff and students.
J. *External-community political pressures:* demands by special interest parties, citizen action groups and community agencies.
K. *Staff recommendations and/or needs assessment:* reports from advisory bodies and study groups, informal advice.
L. *Past practice and local tradition:* continuation of programs because of local tradition.
M. *Program quality and evaluation results:* relationship between program costs and program accomplishments.
N. *Accreditation standards:* formal recommendations concerning staffing, programs and facilities.
O. *Principle of least opposition:* decisions least likely to create controversy.

* Here's how the Connecticut superintendents ranked the criteria, with the most important listed first: 1, B; 2, F; 3, E; 4, A; 5, M; 6, D; 7, K; 8, I; 9, G; 10, N; 11, L; 12, C; 13, J; 14, H; 15, O.

which must get its support from the voters at the polls.

Some other districts use committees of staff *and* citizens in the budget making process. Here are a couple of examples:

The Long Beach (Calif.) Unified School District established a committee appropriately named BIG (Budget Information Group) that meets at least monthly from February through budget adoption in August. It is a formal part of the budget process itself, a sounding board for the district's budget committee, which is composed of the superintendent and other administrators. BIG reviews the proposed budget and rationale and suggests changes.

BIG includes representatives of all internal and external groups that have a stake in the budget. Thus, representatives of the PTA and the League of Women Voters sit alongside those of the teachers union, counselors and principals to make their feelings known.

This approach, while not the cure-all for budget problems, has had some immediate payoffs, according to Richard G. Van Der Laan, director of public and employee information.

"It has reduced some of the 'off-the-wall' criticisms we had received in the past," he explained. "Charges of squirreling away hidden millions and churning out barely intelligible budget documents now occur less frequently. Employee organizations seem to appreciate being included as insiders who receive the latest word on the status of initial finance estimates, crucial school finance legislation and its probable impact on the district. They also receive reasonably clear explanations of how our annual spending plan (the budget) is put together. Instead of having a 600-page monster dropped on them at the public budget hearing late in the summer, our employee organizations and key citizen groups now have months of advance notice to learn what's being proposed and to see how changing financial conditions and laws affect ending balances, reserves, income projections."

The Jefferson County Public Schools in suburban Denver, Colo., also uses staff-citizen task forces as part of its annual budget process.

There are five task forces in all, covering various phases of the school budget. Each has about two dozen members who meet 8 to 10 evenings between mid-April and mid-June for two to three hours at a time.

The makeup of the task forces varies with the subjects. The Task Force on Classroom Instruction and Program Implementation, for example, contains one citizen elected from each of 12 area advisory committees, three teachers appointed by the teachers union, three administrators appointed by the administrators association, one PTSA representative and five citizens appointed by the Board of Education.

The task forces are formal and structured. A staff liaison is named, the meetings are open and on the record, and minutes are taken and shared with the other task forces.

The functions of the task forces, as set forth in the district's procedures, are as follows:

- Study the adopted budget for the current fiscal year.
- Study the budget increases and decreases proposed by program managers and committee members.
- Study the background materials provided by the program managers. These materials shall be distributed one week prior to the scheduled review.
- Invite managers to be present for the task force review of their areas of responsibility.

Each task force must conclude its activities and make budget recommendations to the board during June. The recommendations, the district emphasizes, are advisory only. But the priorities established by the various committees go to the board on forms designed for that purpose. Priorities are rated by a formal ranking process; thus, the board gives them considerable weight in its deliberations.

A parallel committee structure involving the school district's mid-management administrators studies budget proposals, and all of the recommendations come together in formal reports to the superintendent and the board. Committee priorities are ranked numerically, and a score card accompanies each report. At the same time, committee chairpersons sit in during budget deliberations and can speak up for their priorities.

While the ultimate decisions are made by the superintendent and the board, the committee process strongly influences those decisions, according to James B. Mortensen, assistant superintendent for management information services.

Committee members' influence, in fact, flows in both directions, Mortensen said. In the first place, their involvement in the budget process "gives staff a sampling of community opinion on what programs ought to be expanded or deleted and those for which citizens might be willing to dig deeper into their pockets to fund."

At the same time, the committees are an invaluable tool in getting the word out to the community. The Jefferson County district, with an enrollment of

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77,000 in 112 schools, has a large community to inform.

"This is one of the best ways I know to educate an important portion of the public about the complexity of the school budgeting process — to show how complicated the school district operation really is," Mortensen said.

One way of getting the word out is by inviting members of the business community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to sit in on meetings. The budget task forces also touch base routinely with the local school improvement committees — one at each building composed of parents, staff and sometimes students — to communicate the budget situation. The task forces create an effective communications network that reaches far into the community, Mortensen said.

Another side benefit, he added, is in the potential impact on the negotiations process. Including members of the teachers union on each of the task forces gives that organization a firsthand understanding of the district's situation (although, Mortensen stressed, teachers are chosen to speak as representatives of the teacher group, not the union). This involvement, he feels, helps the union come up with more realistic, responsible positions than if it is shut out entirely from the deliberations.

One word of caution: "The process we use takes an awful lot of staff time," Mortensen said, "and there have been many times when we asked ourselves, 'Is it really worth it?' But," he noted, "when we see all those people turn out as advocates for our school program, we all have to agree it is worth it."

Needs Assessment

This is a fancy term for a survey asking what a district should — or shouldn't — be doing. There are a number of ways to conduct a survey, some more scientific than others.

Whatever the method, the survey should be taken *long before* the budget document is put together, for these reasons:

- The district does not know what the public is willing to pay for — and not pay for — unless it asks.
- This information will make budget decisions much easier.
- This information will give the district an opportunity to tell the community, "We know what you want us to do, and we're doing it."
- When the community feels that its wishes are being heeded, it will be far more supportive of the schools and the school budget.

A needs assessment at its most scientific level is the one offered through the National School Boards Association by Policy Studies in Education, a New York City firm headed by Mitch Brickell. A team of interviewers from the firm visits a district's community and conducts a multifaceted survey about the public's perceptions and desires.

Brickell makes an important distinction between what members of the community want young people to *learn* and what they want the schools to *teach*. This distinction, he said, is the key to drawing up a responsive budget. Yet, he noted, too many districts assume that a desired learning goal is by definition a teaching objective of the public schools.

"You will find," Brickell explained, "that many items high on the *learning* priority list are low on the *teaching* priorities." A common example of that, he pointed out, is "morality" or "values." All students should learn them, parents agree, but not in school. These and other goals may be more the purview of the home and the church, some feel.

Brickell uses another type of question to determine public priorities in schools — one that turns up some surprises. He tells interviewees they have a million dollars to spend on public education and asks them to divide it among the various subjects and related cost items.

Some of the results are predictable, like emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and computing, but others are eye-openers. "You will probably find," Brickell said, "that some of the programs you thought were sacred are, in fact, supported by only a small segment of the community." In other words, the threat to eliminate a program like junior high school athletics "may bring a horde of angry parents to a board meeting and give the impression that such a move would mean revolution, when in fact those are the only people in the community who care about it at all."

A well-done needs assessment gives a district the tools to build a responsive budget and the ammunition with which to sell it. And it does more than that. It enables the board and the administration to see many pressure groups for what they are: vocal but small groups of people who, in fact, do not have the mass backing they claim to have. They can be dealt with much more easily once this fact becomes known.

An additional resource: *Polling Attitudes of the Community on Education*, a manual published by Phi Delta Kappan, offers districts a do-it-yourself guide to conducting valid surveys of the community. The manual can be purchased separately ($39.50) or as part of a package ($42.25) which also includes

Citizens Committees: Help or Hindrance?

Using citizens committees to help with the school district budget can be a valuable, rewarding effort — or it can be a disaster.

Unfortunately, some of the best-intentioned efforts to involve citizens in the affairs of their school district often deteriorate into worthless bickering. Rather than bringing good will to the district, just the opposite happens. Committees can argue for hours over issues that are not within their purview, or else fall prey to special interests within their membership. Finally, if they come up with impractical recommendations that couldn't possibly be implemented, all the members who worked so hard may be embittered by the experience.

But it doesn't have to happen that way. Here are some tips on setting up and operating advisory committees that can be valuable at all stages of the district budgeting process:

- Make clear when the committee is established what its role is, when it is to meet, what kind of report is expected from it, and when.
- Give the committee a reasonable assignment. Don't expect one group of people to be able to absorb everything. Break the budget into manageable sections, like elementary schools, secondary schools, support services, special education. Name a committee for each.
- Make each committee a manageable size. Anywhere from 5 to 15 members generally works best. Making a committee larger may allow district officials to brag about wider representation, but by the time all members give their views the meeting will be over and nothing will be accomplished.
- Make the committee representative of the people and the interests in your district — racially, socially, economically and professionally. Don't give in to the temptation of excluding opposing viewpoints. Sometimes a perennial troublemaker softens noticeably when made part of the action.
- Provide direction on where and when the committee meets, how a chairperson is to be selected and how notices will be sent out. A staff person should be named liaison and should provide some orientation at the first meeting. Otherwise, the person should be there only to answer questions, thus ensuring the committee does not waste its time because of misunderstandings of its role or of the district's organization or rules.
- Help the committee issue its final report or recommendations at the appropriate time.
- Make sure all the committee members are thanked for their contribution, then go a step further. A certificate of appreciation may look nice on the wall, but it won't encourage that person or a neighbor to serve next year. Personal recognition is the key. Committee members should be asked to attend the board meeting where their recommendations are to be discussed and given an opportunity to explain their rationale. And even if their recommendations are ignored, they deserve the courtesy of an explanation.
- Then, dissolve the committee, to be reinstated when the next cycle begins. Perpetual committees soon become ineffectual.

sample questionnaires, a handbook for interviewers and a roundup of Gallup polls of the public's attitudes toward education. Order from Phi Delta Kappan, Eighth and Union, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, Ind. 47402.

Public Forums

A needs assessment can be done with trained interviewers, as Brickell recommends, or by using one of several less ambitious surveying techniques, telephone questionnaires or forms sent home to be filled out by parents. Another technique, employed by the Lincoln (Nebr.) Public Schools, is to hold a Parent Forum on the Budget, at which members of the community are asked to rate assumptions, rank priorities and comment on proposed cuts.

Participants in Lincoln's Parent Forum in May 1981 were asked for their opinions in three separate areas. First, parents were asked to agree or disagree with 25 "budget assumptions" being used by the board in its budget-building process. The assumptions included such items as closing a specific

school, keeping taxes at a certain rate, maintaining staffing ratios and keeping the building fund at its current level.

As a result, parents revealed they were not especially keen about using school buses for student field trips, spending more for staff development programs, increasing the student-staff ratio or holding salary levels down. They didn't want to cut back on the maintenance staff if it meant buildings were going to deteriorate, but agreed that the custodial staff could be reduced if students and teachers could be made more responsible for building cleanliness.

The second question asked parents to rank in priority order certain suggested reductions in the school budget. Predictably, they saw classroom teachers as the highest priority and teachers of driver education and English-as-a-second-language as the lowest.

Finally, they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with some suggestions made by staff members and citizens to keep within current budgetary restraints. They expressed virtually unanimous agreement on combining administrative jobs, making summer school self-supporting by increasing tuition (although they disagreed about eliminating summer school entirely), and making students pay for driver education. Suggestions such as closing small enrollment schools and looking into the possibility of charging for some classroom supplies received favorable scores.

The ultimate shape of the budget is, of course, the responsibility of the superintendent and the board of education. But, they can pave the way toward eventual approval of the budget through their efforts to involve teachers, principals, other staff members and the community *before* budget decisions are actually made.

Public Hearings

Finally, there is the public hearing, a tradition that gives the community a chance to comment on budget proposals that have already been publicized in one way or another — through newsletters or brochures sent home, news stories or advertisements in local newspapers. All too often, however, budget decisions have been made long before the hearing, and district officials are just going through the motions because of legal mandates.

What makes a public hearing effective, both in giving the board of education the input it wants and in giving citizens a good feeling about their involvement in the process? Here are some suggestions:

- Make sure the information distributed to the community is in clear, understandable language.
- Get the information out early enough for it to be digested and discussed before the hearing.
- Make clear that the hearing is to be devoted solely to items in the proposed budget and that anybody who tries to use it as a forum for anything else will be ruled out of order.
- Establish time limits for all speakers. One suggestion: set 5 minutes for individuals, 10 minutes for persons representing districtwide organizations. Enforce the limits strictly. Make sure, however, that all concerned are aware of the time limits well in advance of the hearing.
- Listen attentively, but don't argue or respond. The purpose of the hearing is to allow the administration and board to hear citizens. They should never let themselves be drawn into a discussion, which often ends up in a shouting match and can destroy the credibility of the entire hearing.
- Provide a spot on the agenda for each person who requests one, even if it means extending the hearing by another night or two. For many people, it's their only chance to voice their opinions, and they'll resent being told the hearing is all booked up.
- Encourage groups to submit written positions instead of testifying. This can save much time. Promise to read all position papers, and do so.
- Let the public know what was presented at the hearings and what impact the testimony had on district decisions. Publish a summary sheet in a newsletter or brochure, along with an explanation of the suggestions that were accepted and those that were not, and why. Courtesy by school officials at the hearings and clear explanations of why some — perhaps most — suggestions cannot be followed will enhance the credibility of district officials in the final analysis.

Case Study: 'Choices for Our Children'

Does a district gain anything from trying to involve the public in the budget process when 80 percent of the total is decided in closed-door negotiations? Will citizens believe they can influence how school dollars are spent when all they do is react to a firm proposal drawn up over several months by the superintendent and central office staff?

Over a decade ago, officials of the Montgomery County (Md.) Public Schools asked themselves those questions and had to concede that in both cases the answer was "no." But the Board of Education and the superintendent had committed themselves to giving the public a voice in the preparation of the operating budget. Therefore,

they initiated a long-term and since then much-honored program called "Choices for Our Children."

The year was 1968, and Montgomery County was a fast-growing, affluent suburb of Washington, D.C. There was no doubt that more money would be available for the 1969-70 operating budget, but how should it be spent? The idea behind this first effort was to involve the public in the budget process even before school staffs began compiling their requests and before the board built the parameters within which district negotiators would work. The public phase of the process started in September, although negotiations did not begin until November and the actual unveiling of the budget request was not required until January at the earliest.

The era was far different from today, and the Choices process, named after the annual budget discussion guide, "Choices for Our Children," changed drastically over the years, along with the financial picture. The guide itself evolved from a shopping list of improvements to a compilation of items destined for the chopping block.

However, three key elements of the process stayed essentially the same:

- A budget discussion guide was distributed each year to describe the educational situation and financial picture and to tell the public what changes were needed and how much they would cost.
- Citizens were given several opportunities to tell the board and superintendent what their priorities were *before* school officials started putting figures on paper.
- The public was informed what the district had done about the past year's priorities and, if they were not implemented, the reasons were explained.

The key to the program was the Choices budget discussion guide. It was published early in the fall and distributed widely throughout the community to serve as the focus for the public discussions that followed. The guide also had another important function: to explain in terms the average citizen could understand how the district, one of the nation's 20 largest, proposed to spend a budget in excess of $100 million to educate nearly 100,000 students.

The first Choices guide, coming in a year in which population and revenue were growing, was indeed a collection of choices — a shopping list of more than 30 items drawn up by staff committees. The 32-page guide asked, for example, whether citizens wanted to introduce foreign language into elementary schools at a cost of $1.1 million or to add 156 teachers to improve the ratio in art, music and physical education, at a cost of $1.2 million. What the booklet did, in short, was to explain a need, offer options to meet it and show the price tag.

The first newspaper reporter to get his hands on the document added up all the price tags and wrote that the superintendent was proposing tens of millions of dollars in school improvements. For the most part, however, the public understood that the items listed were not recommendations, just food for thought and debate.

Impact of Choices. As hundreds of citizens turned out at public forums to testify in support of their choices, it was obvious that the guide had done its job. Instead of expounding on their own pet projects, speakers stuck to the issues outlined in Choices. The traditional tendency of speakers to seek pie in the sky was tempered by the inclusion of price tags. The pleas to reduce class size were not as loud that year because the guide had pointed out that a reduction of one student in average class size would cost $1.2 million.

The Choices process also proved effective in influencing the County Council, the budget authority in Montgomery County, which acts on the proposed education budget and sets the tax rate. Far more people than ever before turned out to testify before the County Council on educational issues.

In the second Choices, the district could show the priorities ranked highest by the public in the previous year. In addition, the booklet reported what had been done about them. The highest priorities, salary improvement for the staff and services for the handicapped, were funded as proposed. The third highest priority, smaller classes, did not fare as well because the County Council had cut the district's proposed increase in staff by 113 teachers. Overall, however, the council made only slight adjustments in the school budget that year — a tribute to the citizens who advocated improvements in education instead of tax relief.

Today such shopping lists may seem like pipe dreams, but the Choices concept remains relevant because it illustrates three basic requirements of a budget document of this type:

- "Shopping lists" clearly spell out needs and costs.
- They show what impact the public actually has on the final budget.

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- A shopping list presumes that the district lacks something. And this is as it should be. As one Montgomery County official noted at the time: "This is not the best of all possible worlds. It's an institution with some failings and some defects we are trying to correct. Montgomery County was willing, for example, to point out that many classes were far too large, that its program of music instruction was no more than 'token,' and that many handicapped children could not be helped because of a shortage of therapist positions."

Those points reinforce this observation about the public relations of school budgeting from Kenneth K. Muir, Montgomery County's long-time director of information: "Don't brag all year how wonderful your system is, then at budget time take hat in hand and ask for money. Instead, you should make clear you're doing the best job you can with the resources you have, but there is always room for improvement."

The tide turns. The Choices document and the choices themselves evolved from year to year. The 1970-71 edition pointed out that because of inflation, the district would be $5.4 million in the hole without making one improvement. The following year was even tighter, and the choices were narrowed to what the superintendent considered to be high priority items. As taxpayers began to scrutinize the budget with unprecedented zeal, Montgomery County administrators realized that budget figures had to be made even clearer if they were to make sense to the average citizen. Consequently, district officials made a concerted effort, starting in 1971, to express each component of the budget in the smallest possible segment, whether by dollar or by percentage.

The Choices document for 1971 also attempted to clarify how much people were paying for schools and how much they were getting. The document explained that a mythical family of four earning $15,000 a year and living in a $35,000 house was paying a total of $620 in property and income taxes directly for schools. With two children in school, the document continued, that family was getting an annual investment valued at $2,278. "An average family with two children who go completely through the Montgomery County Public Schools would have to pay taxes for about 48 years to pay off their educational debt," the booklet noted.

The district also used other methods in the booklet to express costs in terms citizens understand. In talking about materials, for example, the booklet referred to the cost per child ($2.50), rather than the districtwide total of $1.6 million. One year, the district budget office figured the cost per hour a child was in school at 75 cents — far less than a good babysitter would get.

The Choices process under that name actually ended in 1977, when the last guide proclaimed there was no choice but to cut back on district expenditures and services. The public was asked for recommendations in three categories:

- Reductions with little or no direct impact on the instructional program.
- Reductions with some damage to the instructional program.
- Reductions with severe impact on the instructional program.

District officials painted a gloomy picture, but they wanted to make the point that drastic cutbacks in programs were needed. Further, they wanted to assure that citizens could not say they were not warned or that they did not have a hand in making the budget cutting decisions.

Summarizing: the Choices process was intended not just to raise money for the schools but also to involve citizens in the preparation of the annual operating budget. The result of the process, even though it was replaced by other techniques after 1977, was credibility for school officials.

Citizen support in Montgomery County now takes the form of pressure on the County Council. This type of citizen support, said a district spokesman, is just as important to the district's schools as the actual votes other districts need to raise operating funds.

Current outlook. Montgomery County's "Report to Parents" on the fiscal year 1982 budget begins with this message from Supt. Edward Andrews: "The Montgomery County Public Schools are among the best in the nation" as measured by almost any standard.

Nevertheless, the superintendent admitted, "we're not perfect. . . . We just can't afford some of the things we'd like to do — things like restoring the seven-period day to high schools and moving to all-day kindergartens."

The district's 1982 budget stood at $336.6 million, an increase of $26.3 million (8.5 percent) over the previous fiscal year. The superintendent explained: "With a 12.5 percent inflation rate during 1980, inflation continues to drive the school budget up despite savings from declining enrollment and

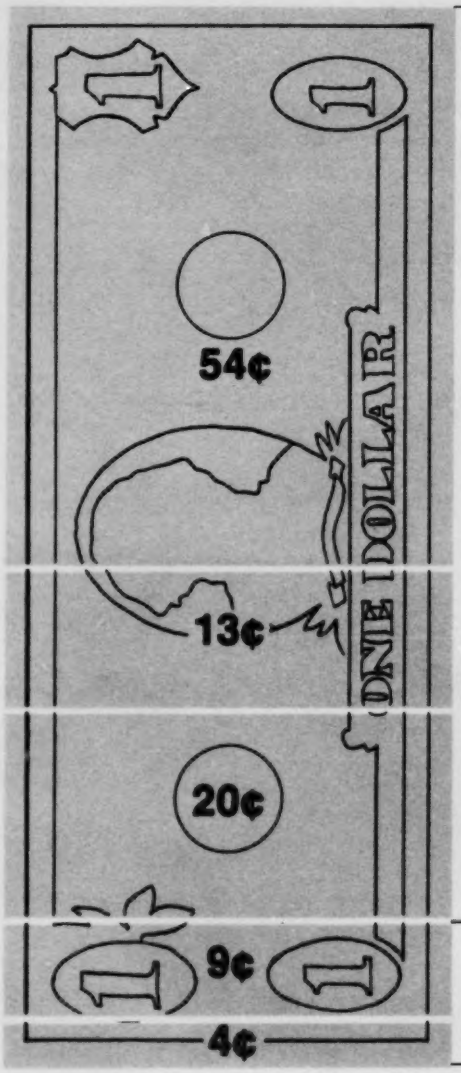
sharp reductions in administrative and instructional support."

The district eliminated 312 positions by closing schools and laying off staff (enrollment declined approximately 1,900 students) and by reducing administrative, custodial and maintenance personnel.

What caused the increase in the district budget? The big item, accounting for 87 percent of the increase, was a 9.5 percent cost-of-living increase for school employees.

In his statement to parents, Andrews forecasted a gloomy future for the schools: "We're very close to that point where substantial or ill-conceived budget reductions could impair instructional programs or cripple essential instructional and administrative support. Contrary to some who continue to believe there is 'fat' in this budget, it's my feeling that we

Montgomery County Explains How It Spends Its Education Dollar



Instruction
- Teachers
- Aides
- Supplies
- Textbooks

Classroom Support Services In School Buildings
- Librarians, Aides
- Counselors
- Principals
- Clerical, Lunch Aides

Other Essential Services
- Heating
- Building Maintenance
- Feeding Students
- Transportation

Central Office Instructional Support
- Coordination of Special Education
- Curriculum and Library Support
- Staff Development
- Warehousing and Delivering Materials

Administration

Direct Services To Students **87¢**

Other Services **13¢**

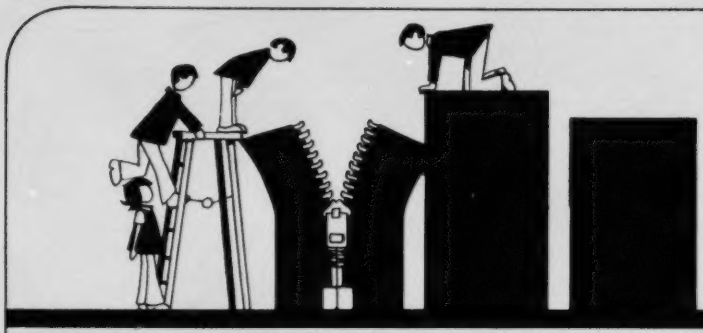
are so lean that the next step is emaciation."

Further, the district explained that 87 cents of every education dollar is invested in direct services to students. Another 9 cents, it said, pays for instructional support (e.g., coordination of special education, staff development). Only 4 cents of the education dollar, it noted, is spent on administration.

As a final note to parents, Andrews said: "One of the primary factors in creating the quality of life that makes Montgomery County the desirable community it is today has been its public schools. We need your support to ensure that the schools continue to remain one of this county's best assets."

One factor that undoubtedly bodes well for the future of the district's schools in the 1980s is the credibility built up over a decade through the Choices process.

Chapter VI



Budget Contents

Every budget, no matter which category it falls into, must contain certain elements to make it understandable not only to the board of education but to the public and legislative authorities.

The bulk of the content is usually prescribed by law, but school districts should not stop there and just hand out sheets of numbers and expect everyone to understand them immediately.

Comprehensive and clearly written pages of explanatory and background information can go a long way toward steering readers' attention in the direction the district wants. Otherwise readers may, from lack of guidance, focus on something extraneous or trivial and never understand fully what is being proposed.

Harry Hartley of the University of Connecticut at Storrs recommends to school districts a four-section "ideal budget." His outline of the budget, with comments, follow: (Note that the example is for a district following a program budget with school-site information available. Other districts could adapt the sections to their budget format as necessary.)

Section I
Background Information

A. Title page and/or cover.

Readable and attractive, though not lavish looking. If it's being printed rather than mimeographed, one idea is to put a photograph of a classroom scene on the cover.

B. Table of contents or index.

Don't make readers thumb through 200 pages to find the program they're interested in.

C. Letter of transmittal, legislative request and/or budget message, executive request, as required by law or custom.

These letters should be in English, not in the language of an accountant. They should be able to stand alone as the district's funding request and rationale for the year, though obviously highly summarized.

D. Table of organization and/or program structure.

This helps readers understand what is to follow.

E. Budget assumptions, priorities and guidelines.

What were basic considerations for this budget? This could consider items such as changes in the revenue picture, policy changes by the board, major goals to be addressed.

F. Budget calendar.

Who did what in the preparation of the document? This statement helps to point out that the budget wasn't a "quickie" creation by a handful of bureaucrats.

G. Explanation of budget terms, codes and procedures.

A glossary for people who don't really understand budgets.

Section II
Executive Summary

A. Program budget summary.

The budget request broken into its broadest totals.

B. A summary of the budget by function/object.

C. Budget crosswalk: programs and the objects within them.

D. A summary of the budget by location (school or other cost center).

E. Budget highlights.

What are the important features of the budget to be brought to the people's attention? Write this in clear, narrative form with statistics for emphasis, rather than the other way around.

F. Analysis of budget increase.

Why did the budget go up? What is the justification for the increase?

G. Comparison with previous year.

This information should be presented in parallel form.

H. Revenue summary.

Estimate receipts.

Section III
Budget Detail

A. Objects of expense.

The traditional line-item detail.

B. Program profiles for each program.

C. Program budgets for each program.

Place these in close graphic proximity to the profile for each program.

Section IV
Supplementary Information

A. Enrollment projections.

Grade by grade and school by school if the budget deals with school sites.

B. Salary schedules, staffing profiles and employee benefits.

C. Bonded indebtedness.

Principal and interest.

D. Inflation impact statement.

How inflation will affect school purchases.

E. Comparisons with other systems in the same geographic area and state and perhaps with comparably sized districts around the country.

The Local School Budget Profiles Service of the Educational Research Service (1800 N. Kent St., Arlington, Va. 22209) provides comparison figures for districts that could defuse criticism of the budget.

F. Five-year budget history.

A numerical report, with footnotes to indicate reasons for unusual changes (e.g., closing schools).

G. District goals of education.

This statement is very important: district goals serve as justification for the budget.

H. Profile of the school district and of the town, county or city.

Include statistical and demographic data.

I. Examples of cost reduction.

What procedures did the district follow to make this budget as low as possible?

J. Explanation of the use of zero-based or program budgeting, if applicable.

How did it work, and who contributed to the final document?

These of course, are only suggestions. The order of the contents can be varied. In fact, a budget focusing directly on school programs could start off with the goals of education, assuming they *are* related directly to school programs.

The best budget continues to be the one that never loses sight of its purpose: to provide the best possible education for students in the community. That's what the district needs to get across to citizens in its budget document.

Goals of Education: An Essential Part of the Budget

The budget document gives a district one of its few opportunities each year to communicate to constituents how it seeks to educate students. That accounts for a decision by many districts to include in the budget the "goals of education" — a locally

developed and board-approved set of guidelines for the instructional program.

The goals should be general enough to apply to all schools and all classrooms, yet specific enough to dovetail with each of the program goals and objectives in the budget request.

Often the goals are adopted with the help of parent and citizen committees, so that the community's stamp of approval gives them even greater meaning.

Featuring the goals prominently in the budget document reduces the chances for potential budget-cutters to deny requested funds, especially when they are earmarked for programs outlined in the goals.

Goals of education take many forms. They can be organized by subject or by grade level. They can include specjfic objectives or leave them to the program profiles.

The Englewood (Colo.) Public Schools, a district with eight schools and 3,700 students, features four comprehensive sets of goals in its budget document: goals for the district, elementary schools, middle schools and senior high schools.

The statement of district philosophy describes both the goals for which schools have primary responsibility (i.e., preparing the student for the role of learner) and those for which schools share responsibility with parents and communities (i.e., preparing the student for the roles of producer, citizen, consumer, individual and family member).

Similarly, the three sets of philosophy and goals for the elementary, middle school and senior high levels include specific goals for which the school is responsible and other goals for which parents and communities share responsibility with the schools.

To illustrate, the complete text of the district's philosophy and goals for senior high schools follows:

Englewood Schools
Senior High School Philosophy and Goals

Philosophy

The senior high school is designed to meet the educational needs of the middle and late adolescent. It is committed to the concept that all youth should share in the experiences that develop an understanding of the principles of democracy and a desire to participate in democratic activities. It also provides opportunities for students to develop additional sets of skills in preparation for careers and advanced learning.

The school offers a comprehensive program which accepts the concept that students are individuals with different interests, needs and abilities. Each student deserves to be in a program where he/she is capable of succeeding and one which best serves his/her needs and interests.

Goals

The primary responsibility of the senior high school is to promote the intellectual, physical and emotional development of each adolescent. Associated with this responsibility, the senior high school will nurture an enthusiasm for learning so that each student will:

- *Be able to demonstrate a competency level in the basic academic skills of reading, composition and computation as well as an understanding of basic science concepts, consumer economics, physical health and development, as established by the Board of Education as a requirement for graduation.*

The senior high school will share with parents and the community the responsibility of the development of the young adult so that he/she will:

- *Be able to either qualify for advanced formal training in colleges, universities or vocational schools or qualify for employment in selected areas.*
- *Become aware of career opportunities which are realistically available to him/her and make educational choices which will complement the general career interest of the individual.*
- *Learn of the opportunities in the fine arts which will allow the student to pursue interests and talents in music, art and drama.*
- *Gain an understanding and appreciation of the many challenges in society, particularly in the areas of consumer economics, family living and homemaking.*
- *Develop skills and interest in selective activities which have health and recreational value through participation in physical education, competitive athletics and/or intramural programs.*
- *Develop a sense of personal responsibility, leadership and independence.*
- *Gain an understanding of ethnic and cultural similarities and differences which contribute to the development of better human relations and civic responsibilities.*
- *Participate in activities which are designed to help young adults learn to make worthwhile and satisfying use of leisure time.*
- *Gain an understanding of human growth and development, marriage, parenting, family relations, emotions, human physiology and human sexuality.*

The Letter of Transmittal

The traditional letter used to open the budget document is addressed to the "Honorable Members" of the board of education. It begins, "Transmitted herewith . . ." and it usually goes downhill from there. It continues with columns of mind-boggling numbers and ends more often than not with ominous threats of a tax increase.

A far more effective opening for the budget document, experts say, is to tell the reader what kind of year the school district has had. What has been accomplished? What needs emphasis now? The opening statement need not be detailed, but it should be upbeat. It should focus not on the dollars but on what they have paid for and what could be done with the dollars now requested.

Note the approach used by Richard M. Sawyer, superintendent of School Administrative District 41 in Milo, Me. He opened his proposed budget with this "Superintendent's Report":

The district has done well this year in many areas. We are well out in front of everyone in Maine, and perhaps New England, with our competency program. The science pupils once again have walked off with many honors in the state and New England, and our athletic teams have performed admirably. There are excellent programs operating in the middle school and primary schools. I'm sure the many items that have appeared in the newspapers about these programs have been of much interest and pride to the citizens of the district.

The hot lunch program which we are all very proud of still maintains itself financially with a high 85-90% student participation. Our program is one of the few self-supporting operations in the state.

The transportation department is efficient, and keeps the fleet well maintained for the safety and comfort of our pupils. We must keep the fleet up to date and hopefully you will approve the article presented to purchase two new 66-passenger buses.

The maintenance and care of buildings is costly, but most important. We have neglected some capital repairs and shouldn't let too much go too long or severe problems can arise later.

The culvert project is being set aside this year to care for badly needed repairs at the Brownville Village School, but otherwise only minor jobs will be attended to.

The directors work very hard for you and they are very faithful in attending meetings. The subcommittees put in many, many hours. The budget committee spent many hours preparing a budget for the citizens. The budget is very realistic and well below the inflation percentages. I urge your support at the district meeting.

My personal thanks once again to everyone. It has always been my pleasure to work with the district's many friends throughout the years.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard M. Sawyer
Superintendent of Schools

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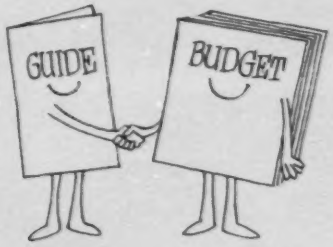


Budget Guide: A Suitable Companion for the Budget

No matter how well the actual budget is put together, a district should consider publishing a companion brochure which explains the document in terms the average person can understand.

The brochure should direct attention to important issues, rather than taking a chance that readers will find these issues on their own.

Here are helpful hints on publishing a budget guide, written by Donald L. Hymes, the author of this report, and published in the *Journal of Educational Communications:*

✔ **Start early.** Doing this job right takes time, and the budget must be published early enough to allow the public to digest it and make suggestions.

✔ **Translate everything into plain English.** This includes revenue estimates, expenditures, balance sheets and educational program. Gobbledygook has lost more supporters than it has ever gained.

✔ **Translate expenditures into people terms.** School budgets are more than 75 percent people. Who are they? What do they do? To say that a threatened cutback of X million dollars will "curtail educational services" means nothing to the reader. But when you say it will mean one fewer teacher in each school, or five more kids in each class, you'll hit home. Remember this is a budget guide, not the budget itself. It does not have to be in the prescribed columns and categories that only a CPA can understand.

✔ **Keep the text focused on the child.** The purpose of the entire budget process is not just to raise money. It is to improve the education of children. Use pictures of children doing things in classrooms. Photos of the superintendent and the board may boost their egos, but they won't boost your budget's chances.

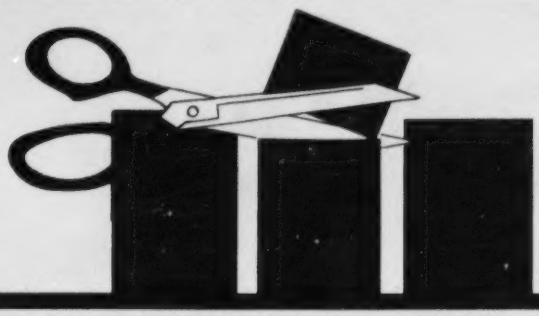
✔ **Explain what you expect to do with taxpayers' money.** Why do you need the money? What is the deficiency it is designed to correct? Exactly how will the money be put to use? And how do you expect to determine whether the outcome will be worth the investment? Explain all of this in English, not in jargon.

✔ **Reduce dollars to the smallest possible units.** Per school, per classroom or per child figures will make a lot more sense to the average person than districtwide statistics. To a parent making $20,000 a year, $1 million is just as mind-boggling as $25 million. Graphic displays can help explain complex financial concepts, but charts are intended to simplify. Don't try to crowd too much into them.

✔ **Be honest and accurate to a fault.** There are too many savvy citizens out there — many civic groups and PTAs have budget chairpersons who would tear your school district apart if it tried to play games with figures. If you earn public credibility, you're more apt to get your way than if citizens don't trust you.

✔ **Print it neatly, but not gaudily.** Don't use fancy paper and more than one color ink because people resent your spending their money to ask for more money. Distribute it extensively, but don't make it look as if you printed tens of thousands extra copies. On the other hand, don't skimp. It should be readable, which means attractive, and thorough enough to cover all the bases.

Chapter VII



Budget Cutting; Planning

No matter how well a district plans and "sells" its budget, it probably will not get all the money it would like to have. With continuing inflation and reductions in federal and state aid, this could mean an actual cut in operating funds — one that cannot be absorbed as in past years, by trimming projected improvements. The only alternative may be trimming existing programs and reducing the number of employees.

The budget preparation process, therefore, should be realistic. It may require a sincere effort, not only by the top administrative staff but also by the board of education, school staffs and citizens to think smaller. This could mean severely limiting or entirely eliminating certain programs and the people who staff them. Since education is a labor intensive industry, the only way for most districts to realize significant savings is to cut the labor force. In some cases, this can be done by attrition, but many districts are forced to consider and carry out teacher layoffs. More layoffs can be expected because, as the survey for this report found, approximately 85 percent of the nation's school districts have either static or declining enrollments.

The challenge facing those districts is to cut their budgets without endangering the very reason they exist — to provide the best possible education to the students they serve.

The biggest temptation, when faced with reluctant taxpayers, is to lop off some popular but peripheral program and then to say, "See, I told you it wouldn't be easy!" A more praiseworthy approach is to make a concerted effort to trim the budget responsibly — and publicly. By doing so, school districts might be able to avoid having the public or the funding authority feel obligated to make further reductions.

But how do you cut a school budget without seriously hurting the overall program?

A textbook answer to that question might be to adopt zero-based budgeting: make every program justify its existence or eliminate it. This obviously works in some places, but developing such a process takes more than six months; therefore, if ZBB is not in place now, it won't help in the current school year.

Some ZBB concepts, however, can be adapted for immediate use. One example: Some programs may be making only a marginal contribution to the educational process, and it may be time to eliminate or at least streamline them.

Where To Start

When California voters passed Proposition 13, the California School Boards Association (CSBA) issued a list of suggestions for school budget reductions. It said a district should start the process by assuring top leadership. "Probably the most significant cost savings in school operations can be made by concentrating on ways to improve the quality of leadership at all levels of administration."

CSBA's list zeroed in on the need for sound administrative practices and improved management skills. Two of its recommendations:

- "The establishment of effective management systems and strategies which will insure that necessary work is done, in priority order, at needed levels of quality and quantity using efficient and effective methods."
- "Adopting improvements in setting and changing priorities so that certain work is eliminated and methods are improved, so that fewer people are needed to do a job. Changed techniques may make it possible to use employees with lower skills and correspondingly lower pay."

Another view of where to start the budget cutting process comes from Prof. C. Cale Hudson of the

University of Nebraska at Lincoln. In a study titled *The Search for Economy in School Budgets*, Hudson suggests:

- Review the budget for padding.
- Check purchase orders issued during the last two or three months of a fiscal year for nonessential buying.
- Question the operating balance (the cash on hand to continue meeting obligations until additional revenue is received). If you review the lowest cash position of your district during each of several preceding years and find that it is still substantial, Hudson said, you may be able to reduce the operating balance.

Those three tips, Hudson conceded, could result in only one-time gains. But, he added, they would start the budget on the way to becoming trim.

Hudson gave these additional tips for budget cutting:

- Find out if the district requires competitive bids on all supply and maintenance items and if it takes advantage of large-quantity buying.
- Minimize energy consumption by checking heating and ventilation and making staff members aware of energy conservation measures.
- Review insurance costs and procedures. Can premiums be reduced through higher deductibles, self-insurance or no insurance at all in some areas, competitive bidding, package policies?
- Consider how costs are handled when school facilities are used for other than school purposes.
- Scrutinize the cost and efficiency of your transportation system. Would it be more efficient to reroute buses or use bigger ones? Could some buses be used for double runs by staggering school hours? Maybe it would be more economical to pay parents to transport some students. Should the district own, or lease automobiles for use by staff members rather than pay mileage?

Next, Hudson considered personnel, the area in which districts generally can make the largest savings — and get into the most trouble. Hudson suggested the use of great caution in this area because staff layoffs can have the most direct impact on programs. "To deliberately choose to accept less or lower quality service or programs as a means of reducing budgets must be considered in terms of its side effects as well as the more direct objective," he said.

Here are some of the questions that districts should consider in trying to cut staffing costs, Hudson suggested:

- Has your faculty grown "too qualified"? Hudson suggested that districts consider incentive plans to encourage senior employees to seek early retirement so less-experienced (and less costly) teachers can be hired.
- Are all your instructional support services really necessary: the consultants, counselors, department heads, assistant administrators? What would happen if these positions were not filled? Are the services essential, or could they be provided just as well by some other (less costly) means?
- How about part-time employment of faculty members? Some employees may prefer to work part days or alternate weeks rather than face layoffs. This could be a way to consolidate positions and save money without destroying morale.

Hudson cautioned against any quick decision to lay off non-certified or classified personnel. A district should review local values first, he said. "It doesn't make sense to reduce custodial services if the district is already being criticized for dirty or unkempt buildings." He offered two suggestions here: review job descriptions to see if classified functions can be consolidated, or some standards — and associated costs — can be downgraded without hurting the program. In addition, he said, the number of classified employees could be reduced by such tactics as using volunteers in classes and lunchrooms, and student custodians with adult supervisors; by contracting for some custodial or maintenance services; by using modern technology for record keeping and business affairs; and, perhaps, by increasing productivity.

"A final step in searching for economies in reducing the number and quality of classified staff is to consider reductions in service," Hudson stated. "Again, consider community attitudes carefully and let it be known that the preceding efforts to economize have been conducted. If the decision is to proceed, then the services to be eliminated or reduced must be selected. Such a choice should reflect the possible total savings, the number of people affected, the severity of the effect on students and on the instructional programs. Involve the public," he suggested, "in reaching final acceptance of the proposed program cuts."

Note: More detailed information on ways to cut school costs is contained in *How Schools Can Save $$: Problems and Solutions* and other reports in the AASA Critical Issues series. See the back of this report for titles and ordering information.

Planning Ahead

Educators would be shortsighted to consider budget-cutting efforts only on a year-to-year basis. Why? Two reasons: (1) The fiscal picture is not

Making Cuts — With the Help of Staff and Community

What can a district do when all its good efforts to put together and sell a responsible budget to the public results in voter disapproval for a levy increase?

That question faced the Springfield (Mo.) Board of Education in February 1981 after its first-ever levy defeat.

Before the election, the board had been presented with a preliminary estimate that nearly balanced expenditures and revenues for the following year. Board members hoped to use the increased revenue to improve the educational program and to raise employee salaries. When the voters soundly defeated the levy, the only way to boost salaries was to slash the budget by at least $2 million.

Rather than arbitrarily make cuts based on the recommendations of the administration, the board decided on a plan to permit everybody who would be affected to have input. The procedure, which was started immediately after the February vote, went like this:

- Recommendations were requested from the administrative board.
- Written comments were solicited from all staff, public groups and individuals. Lists of suggested cuts were received from organizations of teachers, secretaries, custodians, food service workers, secondary and elementary principals, and from small groups of counselors, nurses and subject coordinators.
- Two public hearings were held, one on a Saturday and the other in the evening, to obtain suggestions and comments both from the staff and the general public.
- At open study sessions, the board consolidated the several hundred suggestions and developed a list of about 50 items that would save money and have the least adverse impact on the educational program. District administrators were asked to prepare more detailed reports on proposed cuts and their effect on the educational program.
- Further discussions were held, mostly at evening meetings, to determine the cost savings and educational impact of the semi-final list of 50 suggestions. Finally, 22 areas to be cut were approved by the board.
- The preliminary budget for the next fiscal year was then approved as amended by these cuts.

The most far-reaching of the cuts included the closing of two small elementary schools, reducing athletic subsidies (by calling for a fee for student participation), initiating student parking fees, discontinuing computerized bus scheduling and canceling new replacement buses, and eliminating a small academic summer school program and some classroom periodicals.

Many of the items involved belt-tightening in day-to-day operations, such as cutting funds for maintenance of buildings and grounds and for the purchase of consumable supplies, reducing staff travel and approving the purchase of only replacement equipment.

At the end of the budget cutting process, the board was still receiving complaints about the items included or not included in the cuts. To prove that its decisions were not etched in stone, the board listened to pleas from a group of parents and compromised on its decision to cut bus service. Instead of ending transportation for some 2,000 junior high students, it rearranged school starting times to make better use of available buses and still save money.

Although all of the cost saving ideas generated by the public and staff members were not approved by the board, the district did obtain a sense of staff and community priorities. And, if additional cuts are needed, the board can always reconsider the items it did not approve the first time around, noted a district spokesman.

about to turn around dramatically in the foreseeable future, and (2) the educational program could suffer irreparable damage if a school district reacted to a crisis of the moment by hacking away at the budget just to fall within a revenue ceiling.

Any efforts to trim school spending for the upcoming school year should include projections for three to five years in the future. Cutting back a service here and a service there may reduce costs slightly, but real savings can come only by eliminating or streamlining significant programs or services. But such actions must be part of an overall master plan.

An extensive needs survey is a must. It should include staff, citizens and students. If there actually are school offerings that receive only lukewarm support, they could be considered for elimination or consolidation.

Long Range

An award-winning article by Oliver Brown, assistant superintendent for business management services in Cambridge, Mass., published three times in the *American School Board Journal*, offers a three-step process for planning budgets on a long-term basis:

1. Project the present level of services for the next three to five years, assuming no change in policy or direction. Project expenditures and revenues at their current levels, making assumptions about enrollments, salaries, inflation and changes in revenue.

2. Identify and analyze 20 to 30 programs, units, line items, functions or funds that show promise of cost reduction. This analysis should consider problems associated with the product or service, a definition of the "required" and "desired" levels of quality, and alternatives to the required or desired product or service. Include the effect of the alternatives on costs and revenues. Make recommendations for the most cost-effective reductions.

3. Develop a set of alternative programs and financial plans; then make adjustments in the projection of services outlined in step #1. This becomes the long-range plan for the school district. It should be updated annually as effects become known and as actual revenues and cost factors are crystallized. In addition, new programs and services can be examined through the same process each year.

This approach, Brown wrote, is similar to the way industry develops long-range program and cost planning. It can enable a school district to continue to operate smoothly despite a constantly changing financial picture.

Consultants or volunteers could be used to help in the process, Brown advised, but he cautioned against a tendency by insiders to "sandbag outsiders to avoid change." By being aware of this possibility, however, a district could take steps to assure that it doesn't happen.

Long, Long Range

Tightening purchasing, accounting and investing procedures and eliminating duplicate administrative functions would make only a small dent in the overall school budget. Since more than two-thirds of a district's money is spent in the classroom, real economies will eventually have to be made there. Great care must be taken, however, that reductions do not inflict severe damage on the education of your community's young people.

A true long-range plan, therefore, must be first and foremost an *educational* plan. It must focus on ways to provide the same quality of instruction at lower cost. If a school district insists on equating the effectiveness of instruction with the ratio of teachers to pupils, that goal probably will be unattainable.

Harry J. Groulx, superintendent of the Menominee (Mich.) Area Schools, discussed the challenges of maintaining the education program in the Spring 1981 edition of *The New North*, published by the Lighthouse Regional Dissemination Center in Marquette, Mich.

Groulx observed that the twin problems of declining enrollment and declining revenues are forcing schools to reduce the curriculum, which means fewer electives and technical and advanced college preparatory courses. Another trend, he said, is that many secondary teachers can no longer teach solely in their major fields of preparation. Thus both the quality of education and the scope of curriculum offerings are threatened.

Groulx suggested that schools could reverse these trends, first, by conducting a curriculum survey and usage study in area high schools to show needs. Then, he said, they must think of new ways of meeting the needs — without asking for more money. One example: "Traditionally we have transported students for vocational, technical and special education services," he said. "This was a valid delivery system because of specialized space and equipment. Today we have many viable alternatives for providing curriculum to students. Teachers could be moved within districts at less cost than moving students."

Moreover, Groulx continued, the technological advances of the 1980s enable public schools to

change drastically their teaching procedures. With the new technology, master teachers could instruct subjects of high need to areas of low numbers of pupils at a fraction of the cost of placing those teachers in an actual classroom. This could be done, he suggested, through viewer-active television or dial access through TV, radio and computer; FM radio bands could be used to deliver educational programs; and videotapes and computer-assisted instruction could provide individualized instruction.

Advances like those mentioned would require a sizable capital investment, but the savings realized by reducing salary costs would probably offset the pro rata costs of a long-term equipment lease, the Michigan superintendent noted.

More Dreaming

Many of the educators questioned for this report said the ultimate outcome of a long-term budget crisis will be an educational system totally unlike anything today. The budget will return to the level of past generations, they say. Further, some administrators believe that trying to hold onto traditional structures by nipping away at services each year will eventually bankrupt the educational program, if not the balance sheet.

D. Sam Scheele, a "social engineer" who has moved into education after working with business and industry for most of his career, phrases his message succinctly: "Education can't get there from here."

What "there" means is a condition sometime in the future when public education delivers the same quality of learning to its students at a sharply reduced level of funding. All schools are doing now, he said, is "improving the model." This is equivalent, in Scheele's view, to the idea that the way to improve the mechanical calculator is to make it out of plastic instead of metal. It is still a calculator, and it still does the same thing.

In consulting with school districts, Scheele makes this pronouncement: "The classroom has to go." As it turns out, he is not joking.

Scheele, president of Social Engineering Technology, Los Angeles, is trying to inspire school leaders to think about educating youngsters without the mind-set of one teacher to so many children within four walls. He conducts what he calls "extended strategy" workshops, meeting over a period of at least two years, in which educators are forced to think in an entirely different context — up to and including school without schools.

Small Is Beautiful, But. . .

Is small really beautiful? Even if it is, is it economical?

Is it worthwhile, considering today's financial pressures, to hang onto the dream of "local control" at whatever cost?

Prof. C Cale Hudson of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, in his study, *The Search for Economy in School Districts*, looked at the many hundreds of small school districts in his state and wondered if it might be time to think seriously about consolidation.

One way many districts have worked to avoid duplication of administrative or management overhead is through joining together in regional organizations. Many school districts are now members of service agencies. (Membership in the American Association of Educational Service Agencies, a contract agency of AASA, has grown rapidly during the past few years.) Other school districts have become part of school improvement councils or other types of cooperative organizations.

It is becoming more and more difficult, Hudson pointed out, to provide the programs needed by special student populations at a reasonable per-pupil cost — things like vocational education, special education or advanced courses for gifted students.

One computer, for example, could handle the financial affairs of dozens of school districts as easily as one. There are superintendents and cabinets managing school districts with hundreds of schools, while in some areas, a superintendent might have no more than a few buildings. The administrator with multiple responsibilities, like the superintendent of a smaller school district, needs all the help he or she can get. Budget help could come through bulk ordering by several associated school districts. That kind of cooperation can result in significant savings in ordering instructional materials, textbooks and other supplies.

Scheele wants educators to think about alternatives such as sending students out into the community for a large part of the school day, touching base periodically with a teacher who becomes, in effect, a "consultant" to the learning process. The teacher's role is to help students crystallize and apply what they have learned, evaluate the progress, change directions as needed — all at drastically reduced pupil-teacher and pupil-building ratios.

Research has shown, Scheele noted, that children learn more by interacting with real people in real-life situations than by sitting quietly and listening to a teacher in a classroom. Education and testing would become competency based. Most important, Scheele said, is that the school would become exciting — and more effective — and could be managed by a school district at a fraction of current costs.

A pipe dream? Scheele feels that if schools are to meet the impending crisis they have no choice but to extend their visions and diversify their techniques. The actual restructuring process must start from within, he said, with new coalitions, new methods and new procedures. Most important, he emphasized, is that the public schools should not be constrained in their planning by mindlessly hanging on to what is customary.

Public education is threatened from all sides, Scheele concluded, and the voucher movement could become a critical factor in the next few years. It's up to the public schools to meet the challenge head-on. "Either resolve the budget crisis and get educational quality up at a price the public can afford or they'll send their money to the people who can do it."

Chapter VIII

School Finance Campaigns

There is, in some areas of the country, an extra dimension in the already tangled budget process — having to go to the voters for approval of the spending plan. Considering the public's mood and perceptions about education, and the ever-tightening grip of inflation, the idea of asking people to vote themselves a tax increase is enough to send some superintendents into another line of work. Still, if that's what the law says, that's what has to be done.

Despite all the gloom and doom abounding in this decade, winning at the polls is not an impossible task. Studies by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago show that the public continues to list education as one of its top spending priorities, along with health, anti-crime and anti-drug efforts, environment, cities, and — new to the 1980 survey — arms.

There are many stories of successful finance campaigns waged against apparently insurmountable odds, even in states that require more than a simple majority. What worked in these districts was not just the finance campaign leading up to election day, but the continuing year-round public relations program.

Surveys show that voters cast their ballots according to how they feel about schools — attitudes developed over a long time through personal experiences with schools, school employees and students, and from stories they have heard from sources they trust. There are, of course, others who will still be on the fence as the campaign develops, so the job is to influence them over to your side while cultivating the friends you have already made. As for the negative votes, many of them have been years in building. While you probably will not be able to convert them in a single campaign, your job is to neutralize their efforts.

Ten Steps to Success

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has developed an extensive kit entitled "You Can Win at the Polls," which includes a resource notebook, training cassettes and a finance campaign guide. (NSPRA, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209; $325.) The materials in the kit, culled in a study of more than 50 successful bond issue and operating fund elections between 1975 and 1980, are based on a 10-step process. NSPRA granted permission to excerpt the following description of that process:

1. Develop a strong public relations program. It cannot be said too many times that the vast majority of successful finance elections are based on a foundation of a strong, continuing, comprehensive and year-round PR campaign. One of the more successful districts in recent years has been the Utica (Mich.) Community Schools. Supt. Donald Bemis said there are no secrets to his success. "We're good campaigners, but we're also good school people . . . . What is important," he added, "is what a child brings home in experience every day. Then in a campaign, you reinforce these positive things, and people learn all the more that they have a good school system." He summed up the importance of a year-round communications effort this way: "People are going to make a decision with whatever information they have, whether it's a little or a lot. I'd rather it be a lot."

2. Pre-planning: study and analyze. The pre-planning stage, which could run from four to six months or a year or more, can be the most critical part of the campaign. Most successful elections include a study of district needs by a broad-based advisory committee or study group, which many experts call "seeding the issue." The involvement of

citizens not only provides input for the eventual decision by the board of education, but it creates a nucleus of support when and if the board decides to go to the polls. When the community itself contributes its priorities, pinpoints its needs and makes recommendations, by the time the election gets under way there can already be strong community commitment.

The question of timing can also be critical. Experience may be able to reveal when is a good time and when isn't. In addition, research shows that:

- Tax issues are more likely to pass if presented in a general election rather than a special or primary election.
- Bond issues are less likely to pass the first time if they are presented with other election issues.
- Districts with the highest bond election success rates have the fewest election attempts.
- The time lapse since the last bond election does not necessarily affect the outcome of the next one.

Finally, what about plans for more than one proposal on the same ballot? Harold R. Snodgrass, until his recent retirement the director of information for the Tacoma (Wash.) Public Schools, studied why some people vote *for* special levies but *against* a second proposal on the same ballot for building needs. The answer: "People who split their votes are those who feel that *any* second proposition must be for frills — that if it's not the first proposition on the ballot, it's not for basic needs," Snodgrass said.

3. Study district historical data. Campaign specialists consider post-election analyses the most critical part of any campaign. The analyses must include precinct-by-precinct results and the evaluation of what worked and what didn't. The information is used to set the course of future campaigns. The information can tell which groups you failed to reach, which ones helped you and which ones hurt you. This will enable you to figure out exactly how many votes are needed to carry an election so you can assign precinct quotas. In addition, you can identify the key precincts that need extra work.

4. Survey your community. Long before an election is scheduled, up to a year, in fact, you should scientifically determine your community's attitude about its schools. It isn't necessary to hire George Gallup himself to do it. There are economical ways of conducting telephone surveys that will produce reliable data that enable you to plan your campaign around the real concerns of the voters. Cass Franks, administrative assistant for school/community relations in the Utica (Mich.) Public Schools, wants to know what the voters like about the district and what they would like to see improved. And by asking "hypothetical" questions about potential tax elections, he says he can gauge potential "yes" voters and prepare himself to go after them when the campaign actually gets under way.

5. Develop election campaign strategy. With the pre-planning period over, it's time to announce that an election will be held. But experts insist that unless the board of education is unanimous in this decision, it could signal trouble to the community.

The first announcement of an upcoming election could be the most important communication you will make about it. The news release should be clear in the way it defines the need, describes the recommendations of the citizens committee and outlines the cost to each taxpayer.

Unless state law specifically mandates the wording of the ballot itself, it would be a good idea to work with local legal authorities to develop the clearest and simplest wording possible. Include that wording in the initial announcement. The release to the media should be made at a news conference at which all pertinent information is supplied — along with phone numbers of school officials to call for additional information at any time of the day or night. As the NSPRA guide says, "It is far better to lose a little sleep than be faced in the morning with a news story that cost you an election."

Another important step at this stage is to appoint election chairpersons with as diverse a representation as possible, along with a steering committee of a manageable size — 10 or 15 at most. The members of the steering committee will turn out to be the workhorses of the campaign. A school district administrator, acting as coordinator and liaison between the steering committee, local building level committees, the administration and the board of education, should maintain a continuous election information service for the media and community. This is an ideal role for the district public relations specialist, if there is one, or somebody who has been involved with the pre-planning advisory committee and early planning efforts.

This is also the stage at which a strategy workshop should be held for all committee members and workers to develop a plan of action that local chairpersons and principals can take back to their buildings.

6. Conduct special voter registration. Successful campaigners make sure that a special registration is part of the finance campaign so they can go after voters most likely to support school elections: 18-

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year-olds and new residents. A special registration day also emphasizes the importance the district places on community involvement in the schools, and gives the media something else to write about. (Any publicity at this stage is good publicity.) If these new registrants are charted — an excellent idea — they become an ideal audience for information about the importance of the proposed election and all other school district data. This list becomes a top priority for telephone canvassers to contact and answer questions about election procedures and to make sure these new registrants get to the polls. They can be your prime get-out-and-vote target on election day.

7. Election materials, tools and techniques. Mass communication techniques — fact sheets, newsletters, brochures and sample ballots — are valuable in helping people understand the issues, but research shows that such items rarely change attitudes. The techniques you use, therefore, must include a variety of face-to-face efforts, such as coffees, open houses, meetings with community leaders and briefings. It is also a good idea to enlist the support of local opinion leaders in your community — e.g., clergy and labor officials — and use them. They are part of complex interpersonal networks that can get your message across when your own materials fail.

8. Identify your "yes" vote and the plurality needed for victory. This is the kind of strategy that most winners credit for their victories. It involves an analysis of past results precinct by precinct, identifying those precincts most likely to produce favorable votes, and a system to reach those voters and get them to the polls on election day. The negative voters are virtually ignored at this point. Experience has shown that they are rarely reached through short-term campaigns. If their attitudes are to be changed at all, it will be through long-term public relations efforts.

9. Election day. This is no time to sit back and sigh, "We've done all we can." Winning districts build their election strategy to peak on election day; they issue checklists to their campaign workers that are as carefully developed as a battlefield plan.

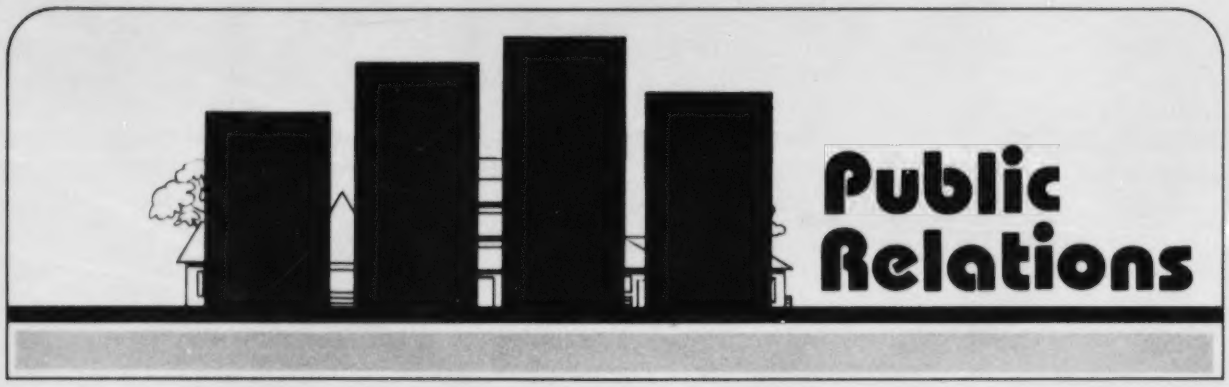
These checklists include, for example, procedures for each principal to make sure that everything is ready at the opening bell, and a number to call if it isn't; and plans, including scripts, for telephone canvassers to call identified "yes" voters and remind them to get to the polls. Watch the returns so you know whether the vote is heavy or light and when you have to shift into high gear. Make sure parking spaces are clear, babysitting and transportation services are working smoothly, and an information center is staffed with people who can handle problems and answer questions quickly and accurately.

Finally, when it's time to tally the vote, make sure all your workers are involved — and then informed — along with the local media. Even if the vote is unfavorable, by keeping your campaign family together to the bitter end, you can forge a relationship that could put you over the top the next time.

10. Debriefing evaluation: the end . . . the beginning. The election is not over until the final step is taken — the evaluation and compilation of the data. This information should be compiled into a notebook ready to review for the next election — every piece of material developed, every memo sent out, every brochure, bulletin, news release and script. The notebook should also include an analysis by the election coordinator of what worked and what didn't, what should be dropped from future campaigns and what should be added. And this must be done immediately after the election — win or lose — while it is still fresh in everybody's minds.

This reveals the people who must be targeted in the months ahead — when there is time to work on changing attitudes. And it also identifies people who deserve thanks for their support and people to recruit for involvement in your schools so they will be allies when you have to ask the voters once again for their money.

Chapter IX



Public Relations

Building a better budget will help a school district along the road to financial security, but this isn't enough. What must be built along with the budget is the people's confidence that you are using their money wisely.

Plummeting confidence in education, reflected in the Gallup polls over the past decade, may not have been the main cause of the budget crunch, but it certainly had to play a big role. As more and more people lose direct contact with the public schools and increasing demands are made on their incomes, they balk. No wonder. After all, some believe that dollars spent on education are wasted; that, for example, "high school kids do nothing but stand around the school parking lot all day smoking pot" or that "everybody knows half of the graduates can't read anyway."

School boards and administrators who shrug off such comments as "foolishness" are deluding themselves. The actions of the people are based on the perceptions they hold about the schools. Ignoring those perceptions will not make them go away. Neither will pronouncements that they are inaccurate. Efforts to change them must be long-range, planned and systematic.

What is the answer? It can be said in two words — two words that school people often reject instantly, also because of misconceptions. These words are "public relations."

Fortunately, the rejection of public relations or "PR" by school officials is not universal. In the survey for this report, "good PR" was mentioned by many respondents as the most effective way they had found to promote understanding of the budget.

For example, Supt. Andrew P. Mulligan, Cheektowaga, N.Y., offered this analysis of why the budget making process in his district is "super effective": "We do an enormous amount of PR related to the budget throughout the year. We develop pride in the school district through constant PR about our accomplishments. We use a budget task force to promote [understanding of] the budget."

Note the key words in Mulligan's remarks: "throughout the year," "constant" and "enormous." Such words came up repeatedly in the survey responses, even from superintendents who wouldn't dream of using the term public relations. They offered suggestions such as: "start early," "make the budget process an all-year-long effort," "be available for suggestions," "give clear and concise information," "be honest and frank" — all of which are key factors in a well planned public relations program.

Sending out news releases and producing a newsletter once in a while does not constitute good public relations. Such one-way "publicity" efforts are desirable but come up a bit short.

In a broad sense, school districts are practicing public relations all the time. Sometimes it's "good PR" only by accident or instinct. Often it's "bad PR," resulting in a lost levy or a slashed budget request. This chapter is based on the concept that a school district, in putting together a budget request, cannot help relating with the public and therefore practicing some kind of public relations.

What Is Good Public Relations?

Following are some general definitions of public relations and some practical ideas on how to practice good PR. The ideas came from no single textbook, but rather out of the experiences of successful school districts around the U.S. Many of the concepts have been reported in the various publications of the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and have been adapted by practitioners.

There is no way to conduct effective community relations. But there are many ways not to do it.

In its "Standards for Public Relations Programs," NSPRA offers the following definition:

> "Educational public relations is a planned and systematic management function designed to help improve the program and services of an educational organization. It relies on a comprehensive two-way communications process involving both internal and external publics, with a goal of stimulating a better understanding of the role, objectives, accomplishments and needs of the organization. Educational public relations programs assist in interpreting public attitudes, identify and help shape policies and procedures in the public interest, and carry on involvement and informational activities which earn public understanding and support."

Note the key concepts in that definition:

• **Planned.** Good public relations doesn't just happen. Good public relations practitioners know that *every* activity undertaken by a school district, from a testing program to a school closing process to building a budget, must include a public relations or communications component — a plan of action drawn up well in advance establishing timelines and spelling out everybody's role every step of the way.

• **Systematic.** Hit-and-miss, sporadic efforts do not work. Commercial firms conducting advertising campaigns don't bombard the public all at once with ads and then disappear for months at a time. And they don't put all of their eggs in one media basket either. Instead, they work systematically, using different methods and media aimed at the various audiences they need to reach — all based on the plan.

• **Management.** The public relations process should not be considered a clerical task to be assigned to some individual far down on the organization chart. It should be a management function, one of the key tools used by the top administration to guide district actions. And just as the public relations director of a large corporation is generally one of the top executive officers, the public relations director of a school district should be part of the management team and sit in on all cabinet meetings.

• **Comprehensive.** School districts that undertake a blitz two weeks before the budget is unveiled should not be surprised when the campaign fails. The task of building public confidence must be considered a year-round, comprehensive process. It cannot be accomplished with a flood of press releases and an open house just before decision day. These tactics usually result only in skepticism on the part of the public. The effort must be continuous and involve all the members of the school family.

•**Two-way.** Often a communications effort will fail because it is conceived strictly as an exercise in "selling" or "informing." But public relations also must include listening. What is the community saying? The district should base its actions on that knowledge. Otherwise, its message will not hit home.

An effective public relations person, whether titled "communications director" or "superintendent," should consider the potential impact on public opinion of any action the district contemplates. If a negative impact is expected, either the action can be adjusted or an active communications plan can be developed to head off the trouble.

All these concepts can be applied directly to publishing and selling a school budget to a skeptical community. They should be incorporated into the following four-step process.

Four-Step Process

Public relations, the textbooks say, is a four-step process:

- Analyze
- Plan
- Communicate
- Evaluate

All too often, however, a campaign begins at step #3 with a news release, a press conference, a newsletter or a public hearing. After taking one or more of these actions, a district may assume that it has communicated. In doing so, it is also assuming it has reached all the people it must reach and has addressed all the problems that concern citizens.

The public may not perceive the schools in the same way school officials do. Consider: The annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools continues to be one of the best ways for educators to learn how the public perceives schools. The picture is not pleasant. More than half of the respondents gave their local schools a C, D or F in 1981. And for many years, the public has rated lack of discipline and the use of drugs as the biggest problems facing public schools.

Fourth on the list of problems in 1981 — mentioned by only half of the total who cite discipline — is lack of proper financial support. Ironically, school people consider that the top education problem. As

far as many members of the public are concerned, the problem is not that schools don't get enough money, but that they don't know how to spend the money they do get.

Following the four-step process, which is supported by many school PR practitioners, may help change all that:

Step #1: Analyze

The analysis stage of the process is best begun with a survey to find out community attitudes toward local schools and the education students receive. Are people convinced, because of some newspaper stories, that district high school graduates cannot read? Are they persuaded, because of labor trouble a few years ago, that your teachers really do not care about the students? And how much do those perceptions affect their willingness to accept your budget?

Take the questions a step beyond the community at large. Are there other influential bodies that are important in your budget process? A city or county council, the state legislature or the school board? What are their perceptions of your schools, and do you address them in all of your communications?

No advertising agency would ever embark on a new campaign without conducting market research. Neither should you. There are many ways to conduct surveys, depending on how much money you want to invest, but any of them are better than none at all. Local universities will often help draw up a valid survey, and school districts that have developed effective surveys are usually willing to share them.

Undertake a formal written survey if you can afford one, or use volunteers to make random telephone calls asking a few relevant questions culled, perhaps, from the annual Gallup poll.

If your community is concerned about declining scores in the basics, for example, any effort to gain public support must focus first on your successes with the 3Rs. Only after you have alleviated those concerns can you ask people to support your budget.

The analysis stage is, in other words, the time to

Schools Are Short on PR Pros

When a corporation feels a pinch ... because of sales decline or public pressure ... it will often double or triple its public relations efforts. It may, for example, survey attitudes of key publics to help pinpoint its communication. It may increase its communication through newsletters, magazine ads and articles and involvement in cultural or community activities.

Schools must communicate effectively for several reasons. First, taxpapers have a right to know what they are getting for their money. Second, any institution in a democratic society must communicate to maintain its very legitimacy. People must know what the institution is doing in order to effectively respond. Third, any organization will operate more effectively if the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

While communication is the weave that holds any organization together, very few school systems have employed professional communicators. There are, perhaps, 1,000 school public relations practitioners in U.S. school districts, meaning up to 15,000 do not employ a communications executive full time.

Why not? One reason is that many school officials do not understand the full scope and importance of a well developed communications program. In many school districts, "communication" is cited as a number one problem, but efforts are too often not undertaken to staff this key function.

The public relations professional can be of great assistance in the budget process. First, community attitude research can contribute to an understanding of community need. Second, a sound communications strategy can provide reasonable direction to the budget building and budget communications process. Third, materials, presentations and events that communicate, and create understanding, could be essential to your success in funding programs that are vital to the education of students.

sit back and decide what you need to do, what audiences you need to reach and how to go about it. It will also guide you in budget development.

Step #2: Plan

While you may spend only a few months actually developing a budget document, you are using the people's money year round. Thus you should plan programs throughout the school year to keep people up to date on school activities and achievements, and to keep yourself aware of any shifts in community attitudes.

A good PR plan, for example, might involve the formation of a citizen/staff committee early in the school year to review the school budget, plus the publication of an annual report showing the district's accomplishments and needs. Then a series of open houses in the fall could enable parents to become familiar with the schools. Another type of open house could be devised to lure nonparents into the buildings. At the same time, regular issues of newsletters — both from the district and from individual school buildings — could be sent not only to parents but to the rest of the immediate school community. Meanwhile, other efforts could aim at gaining the support and involvement of the local business community as well as city or county political leaders.

These steps, of course, are only the beginning. The plan should include broad efforts throughout the year to gain public involvement and support, evolving gradually into activities aimed directly at publicizing financial needs and eventually selling the budget itself.

Such activities should be mapped out on a calendar, which clearly defines the person responsible for each one. And since the plan is drawn early in the year, contingency plans should be built in if, for example, the legislature takes an unexpected step or your test scores come in lower (or higher) than expected. It is important to keep up to date and not let yourself be taken by surprise.

Step #3: Communicate

Volumes could be written on the multitude of vehicles and techniques available in the area of school communications. This chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive encyclopedia of public relations activities, but rather an outline of general rules and basic elements of a year-round school public relations program, with specific advice directed at selling a budget. Many of the following ideas come from Joanie L. Flatt, long-time community relations director for the Mesa (Ariz.) Public Schools, and now director of her own educational PR firm.

Here are some key aspects of a basic communications program for a school district — no matter what its size — to develop confidence in the school system and ultimately to get the money it needs to operate. They are listed here in no particular order of priority, because all are important:

• **Community newsletter.** Publish one at least monthly. Fill it with news and achievements of the students of the district, not pronouncements of doom because of pending fiscal crises. What is happening in the schools? That's what the community wants to know.

While your ultimate goal may be to get your budget approved, don't let it seem as if this is the only goal. Aim at improving public confidence in the educational system through feature stories that show students do behave well in school, they are learning the basics, and, as graduates, they go on to colleges or businesses and distinguish themselves. Then a couple of issues later, when budget stories appear in the newsletter, readers will be more receptive to your appeal for funds to support the kind of education the district provides.

Write the newsletter in clear, journalistic style. Admit problems where they exist, and you'll develop a relationship with readers that will be important when you have to use the newsletter to ask for support.

A community newsletter cannot be a total communications program, but it is an inexpensive way to get messages to a large number of people. Make it attractive, professional looking and easy to read — not full of educational jargon.

Don't make the mistake of sending the newsletter only to parents of the district. Citizens without children are also interested in the schools, and they pay most of the bills now. So distribute the newsletter to local businesses, banks, realtors, supermarkets, barber and beauty shops, doctors' offices — anywhere people will pick one up.

• **Staff newsletter.** Never underestimate the importance of staff members in carrying the school message into the community. The custodian may have as much influence in his neighborhood as the superintendent in his, so keep all staff well informed — not only on budget issues but also on curriculum and student achievement.

A regular publication directed to all staff — substitutes and noon aides as well as teachers and

principals — will help develop a feeling of pride in the district.

Include stories about new classroom programs that are working and any plans you have to improve others. Clarify actions by the board and superintendent that affect staff members. Be open and frank. Admit problems and discuss solutions. Most of all, make everybody feel part of the school team, and they'll go to bat for you when you really need them.

• **Community involvement.** Newsletters are fine to make people aware of issues, but research has shown that the written word rarely persuades anybody to change his or her attitude. What does? Face-to-face communication; opportunities to exchange ideas. Get members of the community — parents as well as those without children in school — involved in the affairs of the school district.

One good way to do that is through community advisory committees, not just on the budget but on setting curriculum priorities, resolving the problems of declining enrollment, improving career education offerings, to name a few areas. Appoint committee members, monitor their progress, listen to their recommendations and recognize them for their service. You'll not only get ideas that you may want to incorporate into your programs, but you'll also build a base of support in the community.

• **Staff involvement.** The same goes for the members of the staff. Use teacher committees to help revise curriculum and committees of supporting staff to work on projects affecting them. Show that you are interested in their views, and they will support yours. Involvement of staff in preparation of the budget can go far toward building a groundswell of support that could result in passage.

• **Key communicators.** Research shows there are individuals in each community who have remarkable influence among their neighbors. These are not necessarily elected officials or civic club leaders. They could be bartenders, barbers, supermarket cashiers, bank tellers or others. Make an effort to find out who they are and recruit them into a communications network. A telephone network or "tree," for example, could be activated by key communicators whenever an incident occurs in the schools that could result in unpleasant rumors overtaking the community.

Key communicators could also be a source of instant information for you — the school administrator. Ask them to call whenever they hear people griping about a school matter or to report the reaction to some action you have taken. Finally, as part of your team, key communicators can relay your budget message to their friends far more persuasively than any brochure or news releases you can prepare.

• **Open houses.** The Gallup poll has shown that citizens who have recently been inside a school tend to be more supportive than those who have not. It's as simple as that.

Participation in an adult education program, attendance at an art show or music festival or just walking through an open house can make people more supportive of the schools.

Open houses are traditional ways of getting parents into the building to meet teachers, but with only a little bit more effort you can attract nonparents as well. Just schedule activities — featuring the students — that would interest nonparents. Some ideas: Have children "adopt" a neighbor (nonparent) of theirs or have PTA members get on the phone to solicit attendance at school activities. Seeing children at work or in school performances can reverse the negative attitude of citizens who have no direct contact with local schools.

• **Senior citizens days.** This rapidly growing population group could be the single most destructive influence on school budgets. Many senior citizens feel they have no direct stake in the schools anymore. Consequently, they want their tax money to go to other services more directly aimed at their needs.

More and more schools are reaching out to these citizens, and not just to those who have grandchildren in the local schools. Some ideas: Schedule programs just for senior citizens, with performances by youngsters and demonstrations of new teaching techniques. Issue discount coupons for school events. Actively recruit senior citizens as reading aides, or to share their hobbies or skills with students in the classroom.

Many older people are bored with their existence, and involvement in local school activities can give them a new lease on life — and a totally new attitude about the schools. This goes for residents of nursing homes as well. A mutually rewarding experience for seniors and students is to have classes "adopt" a nursing home. The students can pay visits and exchange little gifts at holiday times. This helps youngsters understand an often misunderstood aspect of life — getting old — and it certainly helps senior citizens to understand and appreciate the younger generation — and your school system.

• **Business lunches and/or breakfasts.** Members

of the business community represent another force that can help or hinder local schools. Very often these people must carry a heavy burden of taxation, and unless they feel a responsibility for the school system, they could be a negative influence at budget time. Solicit their involvement in school affairs.

Invite service and business clubs to hold their luncheon meetings in your buildings. Give them a brief tour of classrooms in action and a five-minute speech about the youngsters' activities. Invite local business people to speak to students about the role of business in a community and their business in particular. Call upon them to demonstrate their individual skills in helping a school or the district manage its business affairs.

District officials often find a great deal of expertise in the business community that can be tapped to help schools. Otherwise, these people may be looking at the schools and complaining: "If they could only operate more efficiently or use more modern business techniques, they'd be able to get more for the money."

By giving business people an opportunity to advise you, they'll learn about the schools and could become supporters as well as advisers.

• **The budget brochure.** This is a must, because a written document is an especially effective way to communicate budget facts and figures. But don't rely on it totally to convey your message.

Make sure that the average person can understand the budget brochure. Just as your budget should be as program-oriented as possible, so should the brochure. In plain English, explain how money is earmarked for teaching reading and writing and how budget dollars represent people who work directly with children.

Focus on children, not on dollars. Use graphics to make the budget understandable. If possible, use photographs of children working in the classroom to set the proper tone. Charts and graphs showing how the money is spent will be more easily understood by most people than long columns of figures.

Remember, a million dollar figure in the budget is incomprehensible to many people. Your aim should be to make figures understandable, say, by converting a million dollar figure into 50 teachers earning $20,000 a year. Similarly, a figure of $100,000 labeled "instructional materials" means little, but convert that into specific numbers of textbooks or films or classroom kits, and people will know what you are talking about.

In other words, your budget brochure should reduce figures to the smallest possible element. Instead of saying the district is educating a child for "only" $2,000 a year, put it another way. Say that the district is educating a child for "only" $1.85 per hour, while the hourly rate to have a car fixed is $25 or to see a movie, $2.50.

• **Public forums.** Give your public a chance to voice criticism and concern directly to the superintendent and the board of education. Schedule public forums or hearings; invite suggestions on the budget. This can — and should — take place long before the budget is put in final form.

Many superintendents said in their responses to the survey for this report that the public forum is the single most effective method they use in promoting understanding of their budget. Keep in mind, however, that the larger the community, the less effective public hearings tend to be. Two other potential dangers: (1) Feeling too confident that a forum, at which the budget is clearly presented, will sell the entire community on it; and (2) expecting that the sentiments expressed at the forum — whether they be pro or con — represent the sentiments of the entire community.

Needs assessments, community surveys and key communicators, in addition to the public forum, should be used to clarify community sentiment.

• **Community and adult education.** Community education programs, offering the school building as the focal point of neighborhood activities and offering classes in arts and crafts as well as academics — all these activities provide adults with direct contact with the schools. Programs can be self-supporting, so the district has nothing to lose. People are willing to pay a fee if you give them what they want, and they will begin to see that public education is not only for kids.

• **Speakers bureau.** Establish a list of people from your central office and schools who are willing to speak at the drop of a gavel on a school topic. Let it be known they are available. Publish a directory of speakers and their specialties, and let all the service and social clubs know how to contact them. Of course, don't miss any opportunity to send an emissary into the community to explain the budget and its implications.

A word of caution: Being an expert in a subject does not make someone an expert speaker. Make sure the people sent out to represent the district are effective speakers — good communicators — and that they come across as friendly and persuasive but never defensive, arrogant or aloof.

• **Student missionaries.** Kids who are excited

about what they are learning in school are your best PR agents. One idea: Send home as many "happy-grams" describing student accomplishments as you can find reasons for — and not just for the special kids. Don't forget the average ones.

Also consider the impact that an army of articulate teenagers could have spreading your message in the community. Instead of hiding their talents in an in-house forensics programs, send them to the service clubs and social organizations to speak about the accomplishments of their school and to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities. Nothing can turn around the public's perception of the quality of education quicker than district youngsters demonstrating intelligence, wit and concern about the future of their schools.

• **Building-level PR programs.** No other effort has a more direct impact on people than communications from the local school, but this must be more than just a parent newsletter. There are many ways to involve residents of the immediate neighborhood in the affairs of a school. An open house is only one of many. Another is volunteers in classrooms. They go back into the community and report about what is really going on in the local school.

Don't let all the communication flow from the central office. The local school building must play an important role in a comprehensive public relations program. The effect will be noticeable when you need support or votes.

• **News media relations.** Coverage by the local media can have a decisive effect on the budget effort of any school district.

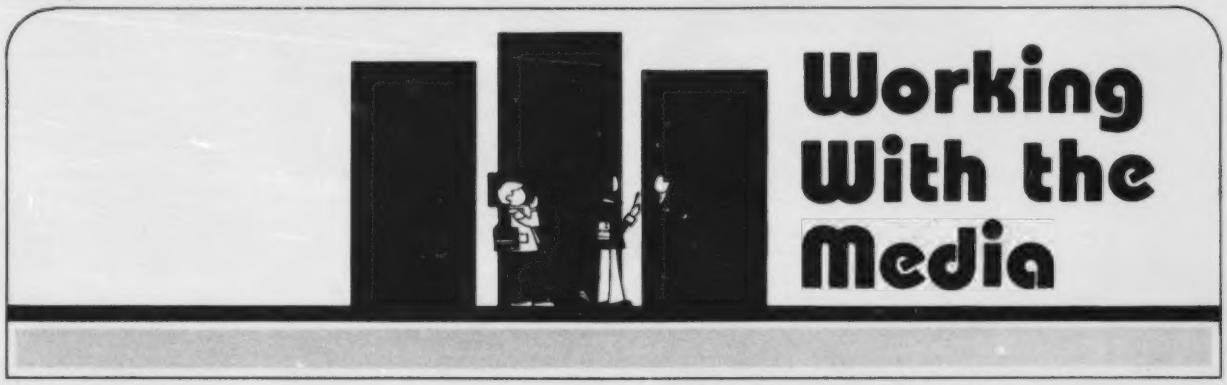
Cultivation of the media can be a long-term and painful process, but it is essential because no matter how well you communicate with your community by the other methods outlined above, a sizable segment of the population will still be influenced by media coverage of the local schools. (See the next chapter for ways to deal with the local media.)

Step #4: Evaluate

Just as communicating never stops, neither should evaluating. Built into every communication effort should be a time for assessing what you did, determining what worked and what didn't and what will be helpful the next time around. Evaluation can be informal — a gathering around a conference table in the district office — or structured surveys of staff and community. Either method will be far more valuable than making assumptions and basing future actions on them.

The evaluation stage is by definition the fourth step in the PR process. But since the process never ends, evaluation is also the first step in the next cycle. It forms the foundation of your analysis when you start all over again next year.

Chapter X



Working With the Media

In too many communities around the nation, the media and local government — especially school systems — exist in adversary roles. This is unfortunate, especially for the school systems, because the press usually has the last word.

There are, no doubt, community newspapers that take unfair advantage of their constitutional rights and subject public schools to undeserved criticism by probing into imagined "waste" or "mismanagement." In some cases, this is motivated by editorial zeal, but in most instances it grows out of misunderstanding and misinformation, for which local school officials can take most of the blame.

One thing is clear: Without the local media on your side, your district faces an uphill battle. Turning hostile reporters and editors around may take a lot of work, but it is well worth the effort. And cultivating neutral media representatives isn't much easier, but it is just as essential.

Any reporter worth his or her salt feels a responsibility to be a watchdog of government, and that is how it should be. Rather than resent this role, school districts should applaud it. Greeted by a cooperative attitude and openness, local reporters will soon realize that the schools have nothing to hide.

Here are some ideas for developing a cooperative relationship with the local media — something that has to be done on a year-round basis and not just when it's time to unveil a budget.

General Tips

• Develop a personal relationship with editors and education reporters. It helps for you to know each other as "people" and not just as "reporter" and "subject" or "source." Take the time to have lunch with a reporter or editor once in a while; visit the newspaper office and TV or radio studio to find out how they work, to say hello and to show that you're not just a faceless villain who is trying to spend taxpayers' money.

Reporters are innately skeptical of people who sit in their offices issuing press releases and position papers. So meet them on their own ground. Something that always helps is to tip them to stories they might be interested in, and not just about schools. If you see something that might be newsworthy, give them a call. They'll remember that later.

• **Always be available for questions**, even if it means disrupting a meeting for a few minutes. If there's one thing reporters get nervous and upset about, it's a deadline; a source that delays calling back until too late quickly becomes persona non grata. Besides, taking a call might give you a chance to clear up a misunderstanding before the reporter turns in a story. Otherwise, you may spend weeks trying to repair the damage resulting from an inaccuracy or misinterpretation in a story. So let your secretary know you can be interrupted when a reporter calls and says it is important to speak with you.

Electronic Media

• **When dealing with radio or television reporters,** remember that they need your voice and/or face to make their story complete, so don't be shy about being interviewed. It may be difficult the first few times to talk into a microphone, but what better way to get the exact message you want to the public than to say it in your own words? If you want to be a hero to the electronic media, learn to talk in 30-second "sound bites." That means that your answer to a question — the precise point you want to make — must be stated clearly and completely in under 30 seconds. If you ramble on for several minutes and your remarks cannot be edited clearly, you'll wind up on the cutting room floor and the media will

settle for the reporter's interpretation of your remarks.

• **Remember the needs of the electronic media during board meetings**. Schedule a break midway in the meeting, at about 9 p.m., during which the superintendent, top administrators and board members are available for interviews by the media. A night meeting will often continue past reporters' deadlines, and if they have to wait until the meeting is over for an interview, they may leave without your contribution.

Fine Points

• **Supply reporters with information.** That doesn't mean just sending them a press release once a week. Give them complete background material on the subject of the press release, for example.

• **Whatever information goes into packets for board members should go to the press, too.** Make clear from the start that you have nothing to hide, that you want them to know everything there is to know about your school system, and that you, or

Educators Answer the Critics of Public Education

Not all the news about schools is dark and bleak. That is the message that some national educational organizations and local school districts have been trying to get across to the nation's news media.

One example: The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) annually publishes facts and figures about education to show the progress made by the public schools. The facts and figures are drawn mostly from the publications of the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of the federal Department of Education. (Local districts can receive a list of the publications by writing to the center, Washington, D.C. 20202.)

Here are some of the statistics that organizations such as NSPRA and local school district representatives are using to answer critics of public education:

✓ **School years completed by citizens 25 and older.** These figures show progress, particularly in recent years. In 1910, for example, the mean number of school years completed by students in the U.S. was 8.1. The figure grew to 9.8 years by 1950, 12.3 by 1975 and 12.5 by 1980.

✓ **Percent of students enrolled in U.S. schools.** In 1900, only 73 percent of students aged 5-17 went to school. In 1976, the figure was 89 percent, and in 1979 it leaped to 96.8 percent. These figures show the strides made, even in the past few years, to enroll every child of school age in an education program. Another interpretation: In the U.S., an education is not just for the intellectually elite as it is in many other countries.

✓ **Percent of students completing high schools.** In 1900, 6 percent of students completed high school. In 1952, only 52 percent of U.S. students graduated, compared to 74.3 percent in 1979.

✓ **Percent of students enrolled in private schools.** There has been a slight shift of students from public to private schools, but historical records show similar cyclical fluctuations. In 1935, 93.2 percent of students went to public schools. This figure dropped to 88.9 percent in 1959-60 — the lowest point on record. In 1971, 90.7 percent went to public schools and 9.3 percent to private schools, compared to 89.9 percent public and 10.1 percent private in 1979-80.

✓ **Pupil-teacher ratios.** Claims around the negotiating table notwithstanding, the current pupil-teacher ratio in the public schools is the lowest in history. In 1954, the ratio was 27.6 pupils to 1 teacher. The ratio dropped gradually to 24.7 to 1 in 1965, 20.4 to 1 in 1975 and 19.1 to 1 in 1979.

✓ **Importance of school to one's future success.** The 1981 Gallup poll shows that a growing number of citizens believe in the importance of education. Those who rated it "extremely important" rose from 76 percent in 1973 to 82 percent in 1980.

Local Spokesman Takes On the Critics

William J. Banach, communications director for the Macomb (Mich.) Intermediate School District, expresses his irritation with the critics of public schools by borrowing a line

some other persons on your staff, are always available to clarify things they do not understand. And make sure that you are available.

- **Give reporters home telephone numbers** and don't resent a call — even at 6 a.m. Remember, you have everything to gain, or everything to lose.
- **Understand the nature of news.** Don't ask naively, "Why don't you ever print 'good' stories about the schools?" Face it: What is news is something timely, different, novel or controversial.
- **Expect heavy coverage of a conflict or a riot or a plummet in test scores.** But, at the same time, recognize that something positive can also be news: an unusual way of teaching a certain subject or a notable accomplishment by students or staff members. Don't expect reporters to find out such things by themselves. They usually have many areas to cover, so they need your help to point them in the right direction. They will appreciate your efforts. Editors are sensitive to a front page filled with disaster and gloom; most editors would like to be able to run a positive feature story about children in

from the movie, "Network": "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore."

Declaring that he was "angry with people knocking us all the time," Banach launched a "marketing" effort for the schools in his county's 21 constituent districts, under the slogan, "Your public schools ... no better place to learn."

Banach noted that American public schools are good. They are serving more students than ever before in history — and far more than any other nation in the world, he said.

Editor's Note:

Educators are not naive enough to believe they can rest on their laurels — or their statistics. For one thing, there are too many rumblings and thoughtful analyses emerging of what the future could hold for American public education.

Local school district administrators should be alert to criticisms of the public schools and ready to answer the critics, based on an analysis of the local schools.

Consider the following comments from Stephen K. Bailey, professor of educational policy and administration in the graduate school of education at Harvard University:

"Poor schooling may be an important aspect of the nation's decline in economic productivity...

"The movement to establish and enforce minimum competency requirements for high school graduation in the late 1970s ... is evidence of a growing public concern with the educational outcomes of our schools...

"The state of the voluntary armed services and their inability to attract personnel able to handle complex machines of modern warfare are realities that will not soon go away and that have direct implications for educational policy. That the Soviet Union is evidently far more rigorous than the United States in insisting on advanced work in science and math as a secondary school requirement has become a topic of discussion at the highest levels of the American government...

"On the economic front, the Japanese are outproducing the United States in part because Japan requires that its pupils spend longer hours in school and do more advanced work in math and technology-related subjects than American students.

"... There is little evidence of a clear vision of the functions and purposes of public schooling, and there are increasing signs that small and local minorities wish to dominate school curricula and materials... Single-issue politics has hit the schools.

"Looking ahead, it is easy to become increasingly pessimistic about public support for the common schools... Major signs (inflation, tax revolts, an aging population, voucher schemes) all point to a re-privatization of educational services and to fewer public resources for education generally."

Source: The total text of Bailey's remarks can be found in *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Summer 1981, and in *Education Week*, Oct. 12, 1981.

the community. Your job is to help them find the story.

• **Don't get into a squabble with the media.** If a reporter makes a mistake, try to take it philosophically. Don't call the editor or station manager to complain and demand a retraction unless someone is seriously defamed by the story. One way to handle an error in a story is to call the reporter aside quietly and make the correction. Ask the reporter to do another story clarifying the error. If that doesn't happen, forget it. Chances are that the story will pass with little impact — certainly far less than if you make the reporter an enemy for life. If you feel there is a point you must clarify, try a letter to the editor — not a vindictive, complaining letter, but a reasoned, serious one with a positive tone.

• **When it comes to the budget itself,** remember that reporters are generalists. Don't expect them to understand the intricacies of your spending plan any more than any other citizen. Sending them a three-inch stack of paper filled with columns of numbers will probably result in a negative story simply because they don't understand what the numbers mean.

• **Never release your budget,** or any preliminary part of it, without scheduling a news conference at which you unveil it, piece by piece, with plenty of opportunity for questions. Officials in many school districts make the mistake of releasing their budget one day and resigning themselves to whatever coverage they get the next. This doesn't work well for anybody.

If your district enjoys good media relations, you can call a news conference several days in advance of the release date of the budget, give reporters plenty of time to digest the information, and then invite them back to question you or your budget experts on anything they don't understand. Such delayed releases, called "embargoes" in reporters' jargon, can be effective in guaranteeing thorough and accurate coverage of complex events. The federal government uses embargoes frequently; they can also be used effectively by local school districts. If the local media realize that the district is not trying to put something over on them, they will almost always abide by your release date.

• **Above all, don't lose patience.** The questions reporters ask might be of concern to you, but they are probably the same questions the average citizen would ask if given the chance. If a TV reporter insists on asking the same question a newspaper reporter did — one you have already answered in detail — remember that it isn't a story for television unless you tell it to the camera — in 30 seconds or less.

The advice in this chapter may sound as if you should pamper the media — and perhaps you should. Reporters working on a community newspaper or small radio or TV station must try to be experts on schools, courts, sanitation and zoning all at the same time, and also meet deadlines. If you help to make their jobs of covering the schools as easy as possible, the whole district — schools and community — will benefit.

Chapter XI

Answering the Critics

Hardly a school district exists that doesn't find itself under attack at one time or another for one reason or another, and when these attacks come during the budget season they can be devastating. Those who are not prepared to answer attacks — or even better to anticipate them and take the offensive — could be in serious trouble on decision day.

The survey for this report listed six frequently heard criticisms of schools and asked respondents to list those their district has had to counter:

1. "The cost of education is going up; quality is going down."
2. "The cost of education is going up, but enrollment is going down. Why?"
3. "Your district is top-heavy with administrators."
4. "You're wasting money."
5. "You're over-estimating expenses and underestimating revenue."
6. "You're not equally concerned about educating *all* children."

For those who want to match their experiences with those of their colleagues around the country, here are the responses in order of frequency: 2, 3, 1, 4, 6, 5.

Respondents offered many suggestions for countering those charges, many of which boil down to the old axiom: "The best defense is a good offense."

In the case of school budgeting, a good offense means a comprehensive year-round public information effort that lets the people know what is *really* going on in the schools and what their money is *really* being spent for, so that perennial critics of the district won't be able to get a toe-hold with their charges.

Here, then, are ways school districts have been able to respond to the most frequently heard criticisms of their budgets, as culled from the survey responses:

Criticism: "The cost of education is going up, but enrollment is going down. Why?"

Comment: This was by far the most common criticism of school budgets, and for a very good reason: it is absolutely true. Nothing would be gained by trying to deny that charge, but meeting it head-on *before* it is hurled back — in the very first public unveiling of your annual budget — may stop the critics in their tracks.

District Response: One of the best examples of a district response to this criticism is in a budget report sent each spring to residents of the East Ramapo Central School District, Spring Valley, N.Y. The report, a 12-page tabloid intended to get voters to the polls in May to vote for the budget and the school board, is full of questions and answers, statistical charts and line-item details of the proposed district budget. Page 3 of a recent report is devoted to a feature headed, "Why the budget goes up though enrollment goes down." A smaller head notes: "Everything goes up — fueled by inflation — everything except the percent of state aid the district receives."

The page explains in plain English why taxpayers cannot expect school costs to go down in proportion to enrollment decline. While many of the details are unique to East Ramapo, the concept could certainly be adapted by other school districts to explain why they are caught in the same bind.

"Up, up and away," the page begins. "That's what is happening to the price of everything these days — from gas and electricity to coffee and sugar. The main villain, of course, has been double-digit inflation, and that's also the main reason why East Ramapo's annual budgets tend to rise despite declining student enrollment. Yet a look at the dis-

trict's budget and tax rates over the past five years actually show them to have risen very little — especially compared with the rate of inflation."

The district's report continues with an analysis of the increase in its tax rate between 1976-77 and 1981-82 (based on approval of the proposed budget). The five-year increase, the district notes, would be 11.2 percent, compared with a 61 percent rise in inflation. Hardly a school district in the nation has not had to endure severe belt-tightening lately and could not show a similar comparison to prove responsible management despite runaway prices.

"Besides inflation," East Ramapo's report goes on, "there are a number of factors that tend to push school budgets upwards — especially when looked at on the basis of per-pupil cost." One factor cited in the report is school construction programs, which require principal and interest to be paid on bonds dating back to 1952. "It is important to understand what both inflation and the fixed debt mean in terms of cost per student in the face of declining enrollment," the report continues. "A popular but misleading indicator sometimes used in evaluating a school budget is to divide the total dollars by the number of students. *This so-called per-pupil cost goes up precisely because student enrollment goes down,* and is therefore not a meaningful indicator of the quality or scope of education being provided."

The report cites a few illustrations. One is the concept of fixed operating costs:

"Let's say a household has two adults, two children and operating expenses of $10,000 per year, which includes mortgage, taxes, utility and phone bills, insurance and other normal maintenance costs. Now, if one child goes off to college or gets married, will household operating expenses go down by one fourth? Not a chance! Even if a room is closed off, and operating expenses can be slightly decreased, they will not go down anywhere near the 25 percent reduction in residents. The same holds true for a school district: though schools may be closed, the dollars needed to operate the remaining facilities will not be reduced by much — and may well rise because of double-digit inflation."

Districts with declining enrollment need to emphasize this fact: Operating an under-enrolled school can be far more expensive than operating a school filled to capacity. The fixed costs in each school, in staff, maintenance and utilities, must be paid, and excessively small classes and a vacant room here and there are not really reflected in reduced operating costs. Districts that emphasize this fact may help improve understanding of the budget in their communities and at the same time convert some of the opponents of school-closing efforts.

Another "fixed cost" item cited in the East Ramapo report is teacher pay, which averages far more in this district than before enrollment began to decline in the 1970s. This is because the least experienced teachers were "excessed" first, resulting in a more mature teacher corps and a "major shift upward in the average salary."

Employee benefits, the report points out, are fixed and prescribed by state and federal statutes. East Ramapo, for example, had to increase its contributions to retirement funds as well as social security at a rate far exceeding inflation.

Finally, the report explains the toll taken by mandated programs on the district's annual budget. It cites Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act), along with other state and federally mandated programs, "which have resulted in a wide variety of new programs for the gifted and talented, those in need of remediation, those with handicapping conditions, and equal vocational and educational opportunities for boys and girls." The district acknowledges an increase in quality and opportunity as a result of the new programs. In addition, it makes citizens aware that the costs of the programs are not fully funded by the government units that issue the mandates.

The district, noting that state aid has dropped as a percentage of the overall budget, concludes that it's no wonder that local taxpayers have to dig a little deeper to support their schools.

Another example of how a district can explain rising costs is provided by Supt. Joseph L. Davis of Columbus, Ohio. He likes to use the analogy of buying a new car:

"Ten years ago you could buy a full-size automobile for only $4,000. Today, you pay twice as much for a car that's only half as big. Even if we could reduce school expenditures by the same percentage as enrollment decline — which we can't — we still would fall short of the funds needed just to keep up with inflation."

Note: AASA continues to offer school districts confronted with declining enrollent two valuable audiovisual aids:

A Profound Transformation, a 25-minute slide/cassette package, updated in 1980. This presentation explains how the changing age mix in the U.S. is affecting school curriculum. (Slides and cassette, $84.95.)

The Cost of Decline, a 29-minute slide/cassette package. This slide presentation shows the factors in addition to per-pupil costs that must be considered in any discussion of why school district costs are

rising, despite enrollment decline. (Slides and cassette, $74.95.) Both slide/cassette packages can be obtained for $145.

Order from the American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209.

Criticism: "Your district is top-heavy with administrators."

Comment: This charge probably will never go away as long as there is one person other than a classroom teacher on the payroll. But the question of what is "top-heavy" is the critical one, and school districts need to answer it without going on the defensive.

District Response: First, make sure your district is *not* top-heavy, as some perhaps are. Paul B. Salmon, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators, suggests that districts hold off filling a vacant administrative job until the job is reanalyzed. "Maybe you *can* get along without it," he noted.

Once the nonteaching staff is the right size, according to district standards, make sure that the actual definition of "administrator" is clear to taxpayers. Some states require by law that such positions as pupil personnel workers and psychologists be categorized as administrators, along with computer programmers, account clerks and purchasing agents. The district should make clear how many of the administrative staff actually administer and how many work directly with children. Separate principals from central office personnel in tallies of administrators. Few people would suggest doing away with building principals, but when they are lumped into one huge dollar figure they tend to lose their identity.

Once tallies of administrators and their jobs are clarified, try these strategies in your budget presentations:

- Instead of listing administrators only by dollar totals, express the most prominent figure in a *percentage* of the total budget. Somehow 1.5 percent doesn't sound as top-heavy as, say, $5 million.

- Show comparisons with other districts — nearby, in your state and around the country. Chances are the differences are few.

Finally, whether in answering charges or in just explaining the district budget, Salmon proposes something that may run counter to what many districts have been doing for years: "Make your administrators more visible."

What he means is to make clear what everybody does and why. As an example, he suggested: "Ask the people if they're not interested in making sure all teachers, especially tenured ones, are doing their jobs in the classroom effectively. Obviously they will say yes. Then ask them who they expect to be monitoring teacher performance and taking whatever actions are necessary? Administrators in personnel, of course."

Salmon also applied the same suggestion to other administrators: those who make sure that the curriculum adopted by the board is actually being taught in the schools and taught well, those who ensure that the district gets the best quality at the lowest price in all its purchases, or those who see that students get the most suitable textbooks and materials for their instructional programs.

If the public understands that administration is not an amorphous concept but people doing jobs that are important to the students as well as the taxpayers, Salmon believes school districts will not have to worry about charges of being top-heavy.

Criticism: "The cost of education is going up; quality is going down."

Comment: This is another overgeneralization that haunts public schools today, due primarily to the growing percentage of Americans with no direct contact with schools. The public, according to Gallup polls of the public's attitude toward the public schools, considers lack of discipline and the use of drugs as the two biggest problems in education today. This may bear no resemblance to the truth, but public perception of poor discipline also leads to the perception of less learning than in the "good old days" when students sat quietly in neat rows. Add to that the publicity given high school graduates who reportedly cannot read, and the result is a scandal in some communities.

District Response: Administrators and school board members have a choice of responses, all based on the assumption that the quality of education remains high in the school district.

Extensive public relations campaigns conducted, among others, by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National School Public Relations Association maintain that schools are far better today than ever before. The miscon-

ception about the quality of graduates, they say, is based on the fact that a much higher percentage of students are staying in school through grade 12 — including many who would have dropped out before the ninth grade 15 to 20 years ago.

Even so, the actual achievement of students can — and should — be publicized widely. Standardized tests, despite protests by some educators who insist that such tests show little about the quality of the instructional program, are a fact of life.

Like it or not, test scores are important to parents and citizens, and efforts to downplay them will probably backfire. Just make sure the scores are published by the school district itself, along with a clear explanation of what they mean. That way, an enterprising reporter with no understanding of tests will not ferret them out and make the first public disclosure, complete with a misleading headline.

If test scores are good, brag about them. If they are not, explain that tests let the district know where improvements are needed. Detail what will be done to improve the scores — at what cost. Don't try to hide poor scores or try to explain them away with some comment like: "Those tests don't mean anything anyway." The public will not believe such an explanation.

Another idea is to focus on other marks of educational quality, for example, on the percentage of high school graduates who go on to college or succeed in local businesses. Some of these graduates can be featured in an issue of the district newsletter, annual report or budget brochure. Other students to feature: scholarship recipients, winners of math or science fairs, or anyone whose achievements can focus attention on the level of learning in district schools. Such examples are usually plentiful; featuring them gives some balance to negative reports such as a fighting incident at a high school.

One other idea mentioned by several respondents to the survey for this report: Invite parents to take the same kind of tests their kids do so they will understand what youngsters are learning today. The Oxford (N.Y.) Academy and Central School issues a standing challenge for any adult to come in and take the same series of tests students take. Supt. David Burroughs said the invitation is a workable counter to charges of declining quality. Many other districts invite members of the local media to try a high school English exam. The result: Many abashed newspeople — after flunking the exam — have reevaluated the charge that kids can't read or write anymore.

Criticism: "You're wasting money."

Comment: This more than anything else shows a crisis in credibility. It goes back to the basic assumption of this report — if the people understand where the money goes and what is being done with it, they will be more likely to support the district. If they don't, the district is waging a losing battle. The types of budget presentations that show clearly the actual costs of actual programs can quickly silence charges of "waste."

Such charges are often reactions to huge sums of money lumped into vast objects like "salaries" or "instruction" or "administration," without adequate information about what the dollars will buy. Reducing expenditures to the smallest possible element — by subject, by school, by classroom — will show that the money is being used to educate children.

District Response: Survey respondents who said they were targets of this kind of attack were almost unanimous in recommending "openness," "honesty," "facts" and "good public relations" as the best counter to charges of wastefulness.

Criticism: "You're not equally concerned about educating all children."

Comment: This charge is especially ticklish because it can come from all sides at the same time: from the parents of handicapped children, non-handicapped children, gifted children.

District Response: One reason for this charge is a general misunderstanding of programs for the handicapped and the gifted.

Districts need to explain who is getting what kind of services and the cost. Spell it out — in English.

Obviously, handicapped children get a larger per-pupil allocation than others, with good reason. Explain that reason, and explain the impact of federal and state mandates. Also explain that many children who are not visibly handicapped also receive special services, such as speech therapy or counseling. Most important: The district's overall public information program should focus on what is being done for *all* children.

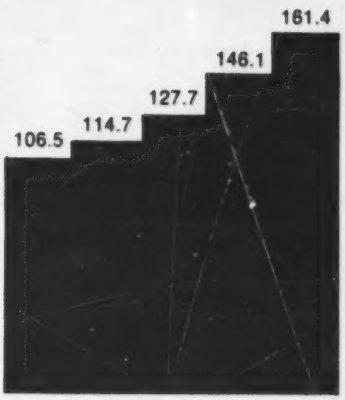
Criticism: "You're overestimating expenses and underestimating revenue."

Comment: The latter part of this statement may be true in many cases, because local districts in

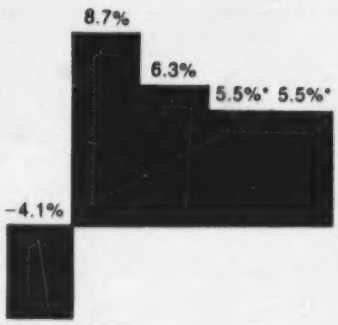
East Ramapo Explains Budget in Graphic Form

The East Ramapo Central School District, Spring Valley, N.Y., mailed all district residents a 12-page "Budget Report for 1981-82" in the form of a tabloid newspaper. It features a Q&A on the district budget, articles on what's being done to cut costs, pie charts, photographs of students in classroom situations and line-by-line details of the tentative budget.

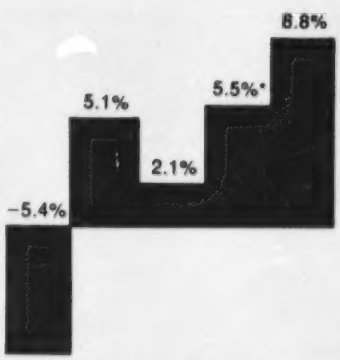
One of the pages in the report is titled "Why the budget goes up though enrollment goes down." The district illustrated the points raised in the explanation by using the following bar graphs:



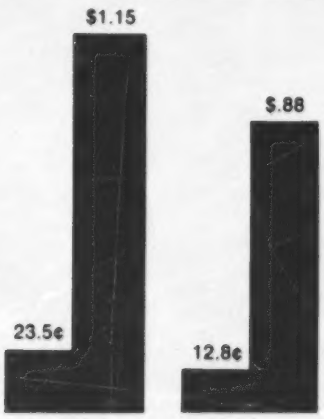
Consumer Price Index
1975 = 100



% of budget change
from previous year
*adjusted increase

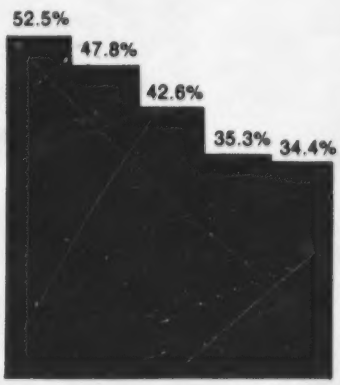


% of tax rate change
from previous year
*adjusted increase



Gasoline price per gallon
#2 oil

Social Security
(in $ millions)



State aid as a %
of the budget

some states do not know what to expect for the upcoming year until well into the budgeting season.

District Response: The only sure way to answer this criticism, several survey respondents observed, would be to have a crystal ball. Otherwise, respondents advised, a district's best response is to be honest, open, clear and detailed about proposed expenses and to state clearly the reasons for problems in projecting revenue. This strategy may put the focus where it belongs, instead of subjecting district officials to charges of deviousness.

Other Criticisms

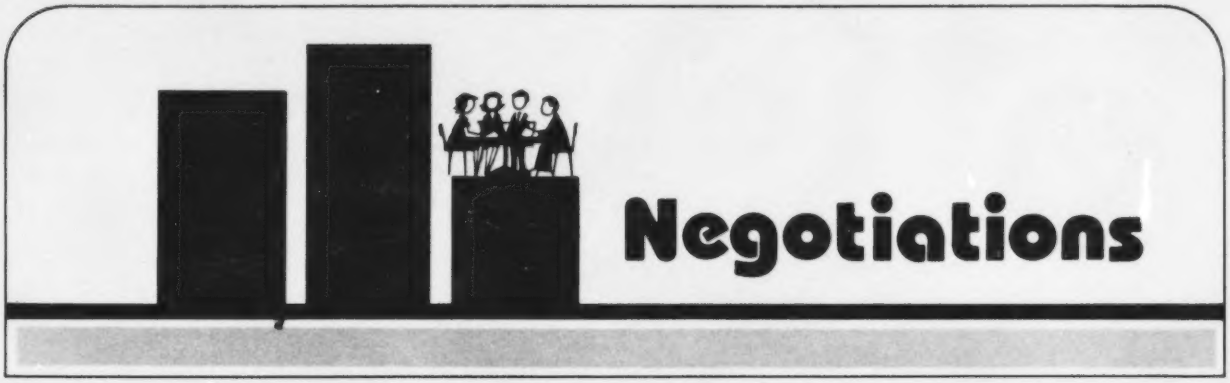
Other than those six, the most frequent write-in complaints by respondents to the survey for this report had to do with spending money on "frills" instead of on "basic education." What constitutes a frill, of course, is a matter of opinion: surveys have shown that one person's frill is another's bread and butter. A needs assessment involving both the staff and community can determine whether such programs as athletics, home economics, art, music and physical education are, in fact, considered frills. Programs that are identified as frills in a needs assessment should be looked at closely (Can they stand a little paring?), while those that show strong backing should be retained despite criticism, if at all possible.

A number of survey respondents indicated obvious distaste not only for much of the criticism hurled at their districts but also for many of the critics. "They don't really want to know the facts," one respondent said. Another noted: "They just want to make a lot of noise and won't listen no matter what you tell them."

There are, unfortunately, people in almost every community who are excessively critical of public education. Sometimes, even the local news media fall into this category.

The best way to handle critics, successful superintendents insist, is with a smile — along with sincerity, honesty and a little bit of prayer. Above all, they advise, stay calm; don't overreact.

Chapter XII



Negotiations

One of the biggest obstacles to a smooth budget process is collective bargaining, said many correspondents to the survey for this report. "The unions are too greedy," several wrote. "All the teachers associations care about is getting more money for salaries."

Experienced school district negotiators see such complaints as entirely missing the point. Collective bargaining is an integral part of the negotiations process today, they insist, and all the finger-pointing in the world won't make it go away. The only thing to do, they advise, is to accept collective bargaining and "learn to play the game."

No doubt negotiations can throw a monkey wrench into the most carefully drawn budget calendar. In the early days of collective bargaining, observed James A. Moran, executive director of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, school districts were able to use the budget deadline as an "artificial crisis time" to force a settlement on the union. But that doesn't always work anymore. Unions are willing to prolong negotiations beyond the date the district must publish its budget in the hope they can force management's hand. If management is not prepared for the ploy, the outcome could be a divisive strike.

If either side tries to play too many strategic games, neither side benefits. There are ways to approach negotiations in a positive manner that can bring a fair and amicable settlement despite seemingly insurmountable pressures, Moran said. The question school superintendents must keep uppermost in their minds, Moran advised, is this: "What is reality?"

In an interview for this report, Moran conceded that school districts start the collective bargaining process with a disadvantage because the budget process is a public activity, forcing district officials to propose a figure before they are ready to. "Many of them try to predict what the settlement will be far in advance," Moran observed, "and if their projection is not realistic they will start the school year deep in a hole. You have to pay what you agreed to pay," he explained, "and if it's not close to what you projected, it will have to come out of other accounts — often with catastrophic effects."

Collective bargaining can be a risky process for school superintendents, Moran said, but that's one of the jobs they are paid to do. "I tell them to take their best shot, and if they're wrong, that's too bad, but it comes with the job." Besides, he observed, the board of education is charged with making the final decision.

Moran bases his approach to negotiations on the premise that "the unions will always want more," while the superintendent's job is to define the "reality frame."

He advises that the following steps be followed:

- ✓ **Conduct a thorough market analysis.** Get a good picture of what the going rate of increase will be in nearby districts and your projected revenue and expenses.
- ✓ **Base your proposal on maintaining your relative position in the area.** If your salary scale is 13th in a county of 26 districts, work to keep it there. "Don't try to play catch-up," he advised, but don't expect to be able to get away with falling back either.
- ✓ **Come up with a realistic figure and include it in the budget.** If, for example, you are willing to settle eventually on a 7 or 8 percent increase, budget for 5 percent and include money elsewhere as a contingency, such as additional staff or funds for programs you would be willing to forego if necessary. You never win by adopting an extreme position, Moran said. If you go to the table proposing no salary increase and the union demands 50 percent, each side will become polarized, and the result

could be disaster. "Come as close to reality as possible. Whatever figure the teachers use at the start of negotiations doesn't matter. If you stay close to the going rate," he said, "they won't strike."

✓ **Avoid pronouncements about "greed" on the part of staff members.** There's nothing wrong with their aspirations, Moran said. "Who wouldn't want a 50 percent increase in pay? The point to make is that the district simply can't afford it."

✓ **Make sure everyone understands "what is the figure beyond which the district cannot go?"** The board of education must understand and agree to the "bottom line," Moran noted, because "that's where the buck will stop." Involving staff and community — especially members of the teachers union — throughout the budget process can pay big dividends. If the process is open and above-board, he advised, the teachers will realize that the district does not have unlimited cushion funds hidden throughout the budget and that its bottom line is an honest one.

✓ **Proceed with the negotiations with sensitivity, and "work hard to enforce reality."** While there may be exceptions based on unusual local conditions, the New Jersey executive said, most teachers will settle for a realistic figure. Trying to force an unreasonable settlement on them will cause them to "stand tough," he noted. "No matter what the revenue pressures are, district officials must keep in mind that 'you can't ask public employees to subsidize a government agency.'"

✓ **Be prepared to pay what you settle on, without complaints.** If the settlement is less than the projected figure, the unused money can be used for something else. But the more likely outcome is that the district will have to cut elsewhere to make up the difference. That ought to be possible without inflicting severe damage on the instructional program, Moran said, "if you did your homework early in the process."

Budgeting is a process like every other and it requires specific skills. Moran advises superintendents who feel uncomfortable with the process now that it includes collective bargaining to seek ways of developing those skills. "The good old days are not coming back; superintendents have to accept that reality themselves."

Chapter XIII

Lobbying

Once upon a time, school budgeting was strictly a local process. The superintendent would propose a spending package to the school board, and the ultimate decision would be made by the local taxpayers based on their priorities and willingness to spend their money.

There are few places left in the United States where that scenario is any more than play-acting. More than half the states have adopted some kind of spending or taxing limitation, with the result that critical educational decisions are being transferred from local hands to state capitals.

Where this is already a reality, state regulations are growing as a natural outcome of state funding. Meanwhile, other states ponder similar moves as the budget crunch of the 1980s continues. In both cases, one thing is becoming more obvious: The budgeting process has expanded far beyond local boundaries, and failure by school districts to enter the state legislative arena could be devastating to local education. In the not-too-distant future, moreover, the success of a school district may be measured by the skills of its lobbyist.

What are the characteristics of successful lobbyists? In past decades, the most successful lobbyists might have been those who bought the most drinks or threw the best parties, but not anymore. What works today in the state houses are credibility, something that is earned over a long period of time through personal relationships, and a reputation for being fair and truthful.

Educators used to look on lobbying as something distasteful and beneath them. And as they sat in their district offices convinced that right would triumph when the roll was taken, lobbyists for teachers unions often pushed through legislation mandating collective bargaining and agency shop, while lobbyists representing senior citizens or truckers or farmers or fishermen worked hard to obtain larger shares of the state budget. Before long, local school districts, avoiding politics as something dirty, found themselves with a growing list of mandates and a shrinking piece of the pie.

James L. Yonally, who served as public information officer for the Shawnee Mission Public Schools before being elected to the Kansas Legislature, likes to quote a board of education member who said: "Each year boards of education are finding themselves more and more regulated, investigated, scrutinized and criticized by the state legislatures. What we gotta do is hire one of them big city, slick-talking lobbyists to go up there and tell them what's really happening."

Yonally, who now works as a consultant, doesn't necessarily go along with the "slick-talking" description. But he is convinced that lobbying can bring about greater communication between militant teacher groups and taxpayer protest groups, and it can give districts a voice that will be heard in the legislature when funding plans are debated.

Few districts can afford a full-time lobbyist, and some may still be averse to taking an active role in the political process because of the stigma — real or imagined — long associated with the word lobbyist.

At this point, however, said Georgia M. Slack, director of state relations for the Dade County Public Schools, Miami, Fla., the choice is clear-cut. School districts can either set a passive course and settle for whatever they can get, or they can go on the offensive in favor of a legislative program based on what they need to carry on effective educational programs.

There really is no alternative, Slack said. School districts should lobby, she added, in order to:

- Compete with other state services, agencies and school districts for available school dollars.
- Forward their own legislative proposals to facilitate the operation of schools.

- Block the passage of legislation that could adversely affect the operation of schools.
- Provide current, accurate information quickly to legislators who need help to know which way to vote on bills.
- Keep the school board, superintendent and staff informed about the latest political trends and issues that could affect the school system.

Lobbying, in fact, may turn out to be the salvation of the local public schools. State legislatures are plagued with the same fiscal pressures as local governments. As politicians, legislators generally base their decisions on (1) what they perceive to be the will of their constituents, or (2) who makes the most noise in the halls of the capitol. In either case, local public education would be the loser if it chose to stay home and let the legislative chips fall where they may.

Lobbying: Not for the Unskilled

There are many ways to influence state legislators, and most of them work. The trouble is, some of them work in the opposite direction from that school districts advocate. An unskilled and unschooled lobbyist, going it alone, may do more harm than good — with an impact far wider than his or her own district. This accounts for a growing movement in many states under the auspices of the administrators or school boards associations to organize and conduct workshops for school people on effective lobbying techniques.

One of the first points explained to lobbying novices is this: The most effective lobbying comes from developing a long-term, personal relationship with the legislator whose influence you need. If the legislator has gotten to know you personally, your viewpoint will be valued far more than if your only contact is the day before a crucial school aid vote. As one experienced lobbyist pointed out, "You can get to know legislators personally just as you can get to know anyone personally, over a long period of time. They *are* people."

Get Involved in Politics

How do you cultivate a personal relationship without being too obvious? A lobbyist who coordinates a network type of operation in a large state recommended something that school people have avoided for years: getting involved in political campaigns. "We encourage people to get involved in campaigns of the persons of either party they want to see in. We encourage them to walk the precincts, telephoning, that kind of thing. We encourage people to do this for opposing candidates, so no matter who wins we have some credit built up."

And when the election is over, have the group that worked for the winning candidate throw a little party for him or her. This is done early — far before any school money bill is even considered — and that's the point. You should get to know the legislator and form a personal relationship long before you have to ask him or her to do something. "We hope that our people are well enough acquainted with a legislator ahead of a crucial time, so they don't just walk in on the day a vote is needed and expect to be recognized or hope to swing the vote," the lobbyist said.

Whether or not school district representatives or lobbyists have a personal relationship with their legislators, they should understand that effective lobbying doesn't always mean descending on the state capital with briefcases full of position papers and an army of "experts" ready to testify at the drop of a gavel. On the contrary, the experts stress, the most effective lobbying begins at home, well in advance of the public hearing or pivotal vote.

In fact, these experts emphasize over and over, lobbying should be a year-round effort.

Legislators, they say, are far more impressed by the actions of their local constituents. Many state legislatures are subjected almost daily to demonstrations, marches and delegations backing causes ranging from saving the birds to banning nuclear energy. One more delegation, even if it is promoting apple pie, motherhood and public education, could easily get lost in the crowd.

"Every day you've got someone decked out in a costume parading around," a veteran lobbyist observed. "That grows old. But when the same 300 people — without costumes — arrive at the local district office of a representative, they will really be noticed!"

And that's the message: the best lobbying is done at home, in a professional manner. Don't just show up with a crowd of people waving placards and handing out leaflets. Make an appointment, sign the guest book, make the presentation, thank the legislator and/or office staff for their time and leave quietly. A march or protest might serve as a release for anger, but it will probably turn the legislator off. And even worse, it could remove the welcome mat the next time you want to visit.

When and How To Lobby

School district representatives interested in influencing legislation must consider this question: When and how do you make your position known on an issue? Do you wait until it boils over? No.

Waiting could result in failure to influence legislation. What succeeds in the long run, experts advise, is working hard to make your local representatives friends of your school district by inviting them to school activities and showing them first-hand what is being done with school funds.

Invite the legislator to meet with parents in the school cafeteria or to participate in a PTA meeting. Have them attend open houses as honored guests and speak at school assemblies. Politicians, by virtue of their profession, need exposure and love the limelight. Give it to them — and at the same time let them see what schools are all about. Just like two-thirds of the American public, they may not have any direct contact with schools anymore, and their attitudes about public education could be colored by hearsay or unbalanced news coverage.

A few words of caution:

- When you plan an event to which a legislator is invited, don't schedule it in your newest high school, the only "showcase" in your district. The legislator may think all your other schools are like that — an attitude that will not help the next time the district needs money for capital outlay.
- At the same time, don't stack the deck the other way. Don't recite a litany of problems the minute the legislator walks through a school door. You want the legislator to listen to what you have to say, not be put on the defensive.
- Don't speak in "generalities." If the issue is arts education, for example, invite the legislator to attend an art show or school concert. The visit could serve many purposes. One example: When the program is over, have a student say, "Thank you for your support. This is the last time we will be able to put on this type of concert." Or have the school orchestra play a "gangbusters Tchaikowsky symphony," then have the conductor turn around and say, "Thank you. This is our last concert. Not the last concert for this year, but the last one forever. We have been supported by a program that is being cut out of the school budget."
- In showing off school programs, involve elementary school youngsters. "They endear themselves to their audience," one lobbyist said, and a visiting legislator is bound to be touched and will be more concerned about cuts in programs.
- In talking with representatives and in having them visit schools, "don't put your best foot forward and don't put your worst foot forward," a lobbyist advised. Consider: You wouldn't need more funds if everything were sweetness and light. "Talk to your legislators about low test scores, the reasons for them and the need for programs to improve them. Take your lawmakers to high schools where teachers are beaten up in the hallways, where the kids walk around scared." The lobbyist further advises district representatives to explain to legislators, "This is the way it is. Some schools are super; some are dangerous to be in." The point will not be lost, he said.

When the Crunch Comes

The time will come when a hearing is scheduled or a vote is imminent. If the school district has done its job throughout the year, it need only remind the legislator what he or she has already seen firsthand. This can be done either by mail or in person.

Don't be shy about initiating letter-writing campaigns on behalf of your position, but remember that legislators are not particularly impressed by hundreds of identical letters bearing different signatures. They interpret multiple copies of the same letter to indicate a low level of commitment on the part of senders, lobbyists say. Far more effective are individual letters, handwritten or personally typed, stating the district's message in the writer's own words. The message does not have to be completely restated in each letter. Just a brief note urging support for the school district's position, signed by a voter in the legislator's district, generally is convincing.

When an issue is critical, a visit to the legislator in the capital — especially if you are personally acquainted — may pay off. But, veteran lobbyists warn:

- Don't try to impress legislators with how expert you are and how much you know about schools. The immediate assumption is that they are ignorant. Always suggest that you appreciate their commitment to education, and that you know they will act in the best interests of children. Tell them clearly the effect a bill will have on your school district and indicate subtly how you would like them to vote.
- Imply — gently — that you and the parents of the school district are watching how they vote, and will continue to watch. Make sure, however, that it doesn't sound like a threat, just a statement of commitment to an issue of vital importance to you, one that you would base your political support on.
- Don't ever lie. Don't say things about your school district that are not true, such as if a certain bill doesn't pass, you'll "go broke." You know you're not really going broke. It's just that you'll have less money than you would like to have.
- Don't insist on taking any more of a legislator's time than is absolutely necessary to get your message across. A legislator's time is very limited

during a session, and if you insist on buttonholing him or her for too long, you will soon find yourself unwelcome. Make your case quickly and leave a brief position paper with the legislator's aide — preferably one that explains in plain English, with supporting data, the points you are trying to make.

• It won't hurt, after the session is over, to drop brief notes thanking legislators for their time and for their votes if they supported your position. If they voted against your position, take advantage of the opportunity to invite them to your schools to see for themselves what you were talking about. Next time around, perhaps, you may fare a little better.

A Trend To Watch: Lobbying Coalitions

Lobbying is, obviously, a tricky business, and while in most cases it has to be done by "amateurs," it shouldn't be done amateurishly. In many states, school districts combine their talents, often with the help of the state education department, to put on a unified front when confronting the legislature.

This is true in Maryland, which has only 24 school districts. They join together in what they call the Green Street Coalition, named for the street in Annapolis on which they meet weekly during the legislative session. In addition, the "members" stay in contact throughout the year to map an annual strategy in working with the General Assembly.

The idea behind the coalition is simple. Rather than send 24 lobbyists willy-nilly to the State House, the representatives of each district discuss their positions, work up whatever supporting information they need and select one or two of their number best equipped to testify on an issue. In this way, the coalition builds credibility with the legislators.

The legislators, moreover, know they are not going to be sandbagged by one repetitious speaker after another at a hearing, and that they won't be buried under reams of repetitive materials dumped on their desks. The legislators are *informed*, not *pressured:* this is what fosters credibility.

Who are the school district lobbyists in Maryland? Their job titles in their home districts vary from public information officer to board negotiator to deputy superintendent. They are chosen not because they know more than anybody else about the educational system, but because they can, by virtue of their personalities and approaches, work comfortably under the kinds of constraints described in this chapter.

Lobbyists who are fountains of information are worthless if they cannot communicate that information quickly and pointedly. And being able to keep a friendly demeanor, often in the face of an impatient critic, is an important skill but one that many people lack.

In larger states where school districts number in the hundreds, coalitions would be even more critical. Such a coalition, experts advise, should be composed not only of school superintendents, but of school boards, administrators groups, teachers associations and even citizens groups supporting educational interests. The stakes are now too high for each group to launch independent efforts. As an experienced lobbyist pointed out, "In the past it worked to the advantage of the legislature to have us gang up on each other — to cut each other up. Legislators could refuse to make decisions because they were hearing different stories from each group. That is why we urge everybody to come together in a united front before we approach the legislature and say what we want."

Such a coalition can do more than just lobby in the halls of the state capitol during a legislative session. In one large state, the administrators association identified more than 200 administrators as part of a "legislative network" to work with local representatives. The network member may be the superintendent or the director of transportation (whose wife is, say, the sister of a senator) or a principal who once taught English to one of the delegates. The members are selected on the basis of their potential influence on a legislator. They are called upon when needed to launch a campaign to provide information for a legislator who needs to know more about a particular issue.

Network members are kept informed on issues and given position papers explaining the details. Each one stands ready with a list of assigned names to call when the word goes out from the administrators association. This is a sophisticated process, one that includes computerized reports sent to member districts showing how each proposed bill would affect them individually.

Although such a process might not be feasible in many smaller states, it does show the importance of taking the offensive, rather than leaving the legislative process to chance — or to politics.

Acknowledgment

Much of the material in this chapter was provided by James M. Donnelly, director of the Legislative Office, Association of California School Administrators, Sacramento.

Other AASA Critical Issues Reports

Declining Enrollment — Closing Schools: Problems and Solutions. This report details the lessons that administrators and boards have learned about declining enrollment in the last decade, among them: school administrators must be "managers of change"; the importance of planning; the effective use of staff and citizen committees in making change; and the need to tune up board policies in 25 areas. Also included is advice on public relations, projecting enrollment, what to do with empty school space and considerations in making staff reductions. Of particular interest to districts in planning for the future are three chapters on: financial survival in the decade ahead, the impact of declining enrollment on school curriculum, and declining enrollment at the high school level. (80pp; 1981; single copy, $10.95; Stock No. 021-00336)

Collective Bargaining: Problems and Solutions. Most of the nation's school administrators have a relatively new chore called collective bargaining — and many of them think it has a negative effect on their schools. This report can help administrators and school boards improve their understanding of the negotiating process. Included is advice from negotiations experts on: what to include and what to leave out of negotiated contracts, contract language, table strategies, impasse, contract administration, grievances and arbitration, communications, salaries, fringe benefits, reduction in force clauses. Two special sections — on nonunionized districts and bargaining for administrators — round out the book. (95pp; 1981; single copy, $10.95; Stock No. 021-00330)

Student Discipline: Problems and Solutions. A large number and variety of measures now exist for preventing and coping with unacceptable student behavior. This report defines: how school boards set the course for discipline; how the student handbook can be an indispensable instrument for the management of student conduct; how to tap student resources; ways to involve parents; what teachers can do; and advice on curriculum improvement, reducing vandalism and violence, smoking, in-school suspension, corporal punishment, and suspension and expulsion. One of the 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1980 annual roundup of education books. (80pp; 1980; single copy, $9.95; Stock No. 021-00334)

How Schools Can Save $$: Problems and Solutions. The problem confronting schools is stark: expenses are going up at a rapid rate and income is not going up fast enough to meet the added cost. Consequently, balancing the school budget in the 1980s is going to be one of the toughest jobs confronting school administrators and boards. This report includes suggestions from experts and case studies on cutting the costs of the most expensive items in any district's budget, e.g., staffing costs, fringe benefits, and energy and insurance costs. (80pp; 1980; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00333)

Teacher Competency: Problems and Solutions. The testing of new and on-the-job teachers is already under way in several states and school districts. This report tells what researchers are finding out about what makes a "good" teacher and what administrators can do to improve teachers and to help principals better improve their performance as instructional leaders. Special features give tips on how to reward teachers for good teaching and how to eliminate time-wasters that reduce teacher effectiveness. One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1980 annual roundup of education books. (80pp; 1980; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00332)

Keeping Students in School: Problems and Solutions. Student truancy — always a problem — is getting worse, according to administrators who run the nation's schools. This report provides an in-depth look at truancy, as well as other aspects of student attendance. It examines why students stay away from school, why they drop out, attendance patterns in the future, and how schools are coping with attendance problems through tougher policies and programs. (79pp; 1979; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00331)

Staff Dismissal: Problems and Solutions. Who says teachers and other school employees can't be fired? They can. School districts can dismiss teachers and other staff members in cases of incompetence or when declining enrollment or budget problems demand cuts. This report examines the following questions: What can be done about incompetence? What are the steps in building a dismissal case? What about teacher tenure, alternatives to RIFfing, and due process requirements? One of 10 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association from among 2,500 new education titles in 1978. (80pp; 1978; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00512)

The Competency Movement: Problems and Solutions. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the reasons underlying the minimum competency movement. It also includes: considerations in adopting a student competency policy, what kinds of tests can be used, pros and cons of issuing a diploma or certificate and available alternatives, how various districts and states are implementing competency requirements. A national clearinghouse on minimum competency testing called this report "perhaps the best single source of information on competency testing." (92pp; 1978; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00510)

School Energy Crisis: Problems and Solutions. Schools don't have to sit immobilized while they're clobbered by higher and higher energy costs. This report provides answers to school energy problems in these areas, among others: energy audits, how to hire energy consultants, advice on energy construction, reducing transportation costs. It also includes information about model programs, ideas, contacts. One of 11 "must reading" books selected by the National School Boards Association in its 1977 annual roundup of education books. (88pp; 1977; single copy, $8.95; Stock No. 021-00380)

Discount and Ordering Information

Order from the American Association of School Administrators, 1801 N. Moore St., Arlington, Va. 22209. To order a single copy of any report, please add $1.50 for postage and handling. Orders for less than $15 must be accompanied by payment in full. Discount on any Critical Issues Report: two to nine copies, 10% discount. Write for prices of 10 or more copies. Please indicate stock numbers on orders.